

LESSONS ON THE

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.



W. W. FENN.

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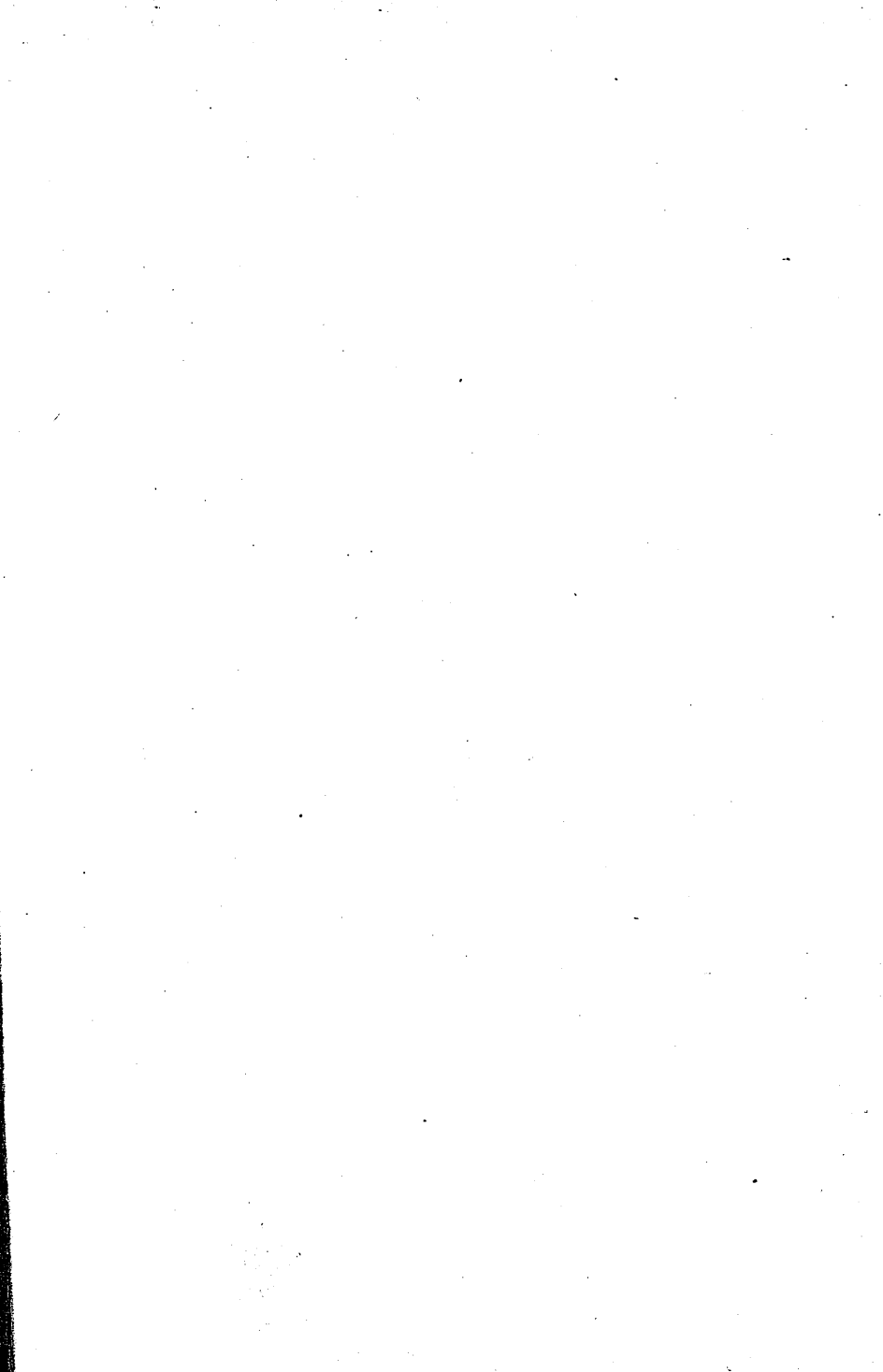
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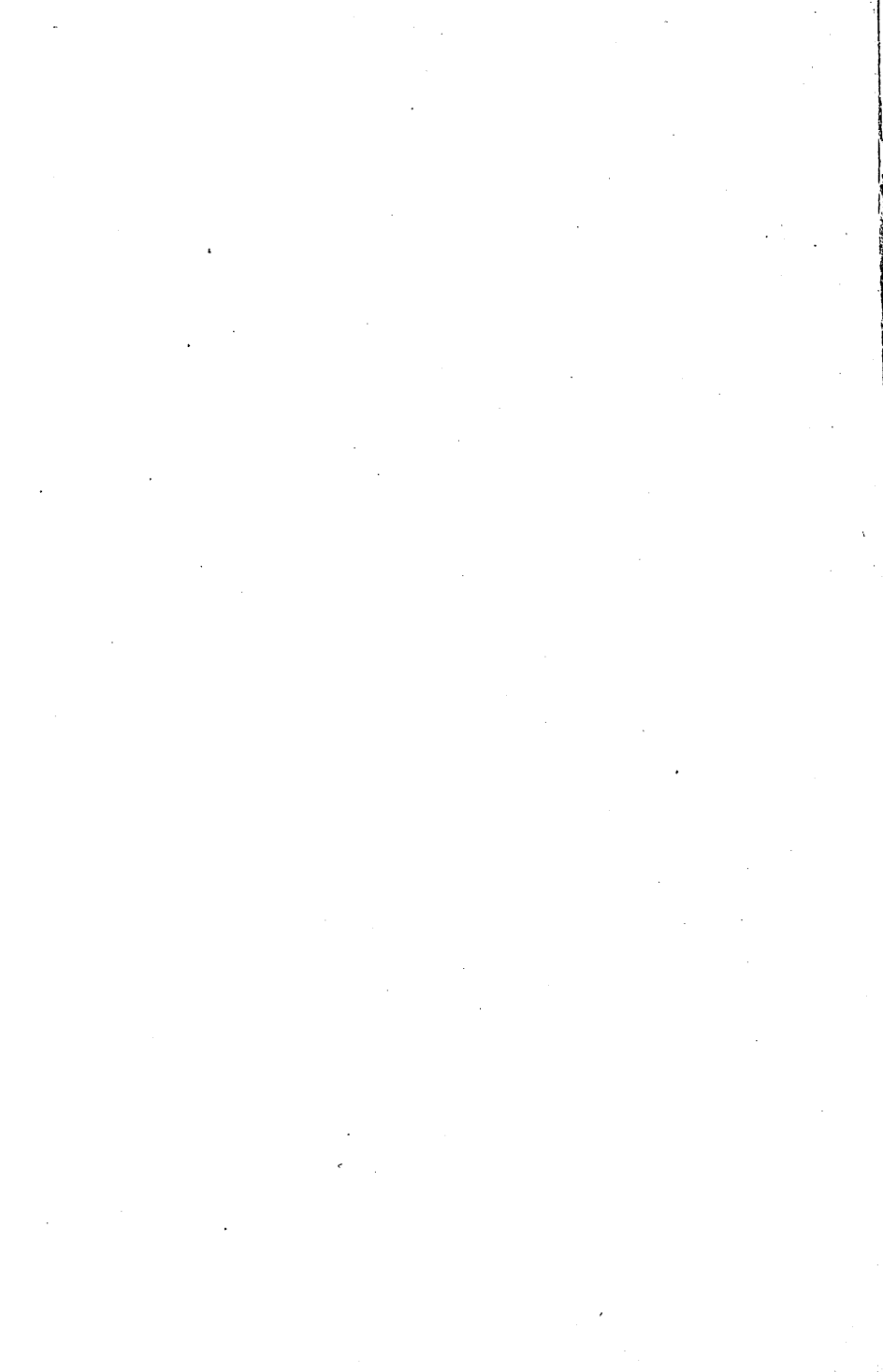


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LESSONS

ON THE

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

By W. W. FENN.



*Given by* UNITARIAN SUNDAY-SCHOOL SOCIETY,  
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P R E F A C E.

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THESE Lessons make no pretension to adequacy or originality. Their sole peculiarity lies in an attempt to vindicate the substantial credibility of the Acts against criticisms based upon the epistles of Paul, notably that to the Galatians, by reference to the character of the apostle as revealed in his own writings. A great deal of criticism proceeds upon the tacit assumption that Biblical, especially New Testament, heroes were always logical, consistent, and accurate,—a theory which is almost the only survival among us from the discredited notion of infallibility. If Paul was not invariably self-consistent, discrepancies in the accounts of his life must not be allowed to impeach their general trustworthiness.

The last word has not yet been spoken upon this exceedingly difficult book of the New Testament. But the problems are rapidly losing interest for those whose thought and church life are determined, not by the teachings of the Bible and the customs of the primitive Church, but solely by what now appears to be the truth, and the polity best adapted to work that truth into the organism of society, that it may become the kingdom of God. These Lessons endeavor to put a student into the point of view from which the book can be wisely and profitably read, but their main purpose will be accomplished only if they help those who use them to a way of life brave, hopeful, faithful, like that of the first disciples.

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## PRELIMINARY WORDS.

The book of the Acts purports to be by the author of the Third Gospel (cf. Acts i. 1 with Luke i. 1-4). Tradition ascribes both books to a certain Luke, a physician, and travelling companion of Paul. In studying the Acts, therefore, we must always have two questions in mind: Are there any indications that this book was written by the same hand as the Third Gospel? And what witness does the book itself bear for or against the tradition that Luke was its author? Only after the facts have been brought out — that is, at the end instead of at the beginning of our study — shall we be in a position to consider questions of genuineness and authenticity. We start, therefore, with the assumption, bearing in mind that it is only an assumption, that the book of the Acts was written, as it claims to be, by the author of the Third Gospel, and that the writer was Luke, as tradition asserts.

In these lessons regard has been paid to the various ages of the classes that will study them. Teachers of the younger classes are advised to make sure that the meaning of the text is thoroughly understood and that its statements of fact are accurately learned. The absolutely indispensable prerequisite for critical work is a thorough and precise knowledge of the book that is to be criticised. The "Explanatory Notes" are based entirely upon the English text, use of the Revised Version being presupposed; and the "Questions" are designed to test the students' comprehension of the text, as it stands. For the use of the older classes and the teachers of the younger classes there follows a critical commentary upon the lesson passage.

### LESSON I.

## THE ASCENSION OF JESUS.

LESSON PASSAGE, — Acts I. 1-12.

**Explanatory Notes.** — vs. 1. *The former treatise* — The Gospel of Luke. *Theophilus* — A man to whom the Gospel of

Luke also is addressed, but who is otherwise unknown. vs. 3. "*His passion*" — The sufferings of Jesus subsequent to the Last Supper. As here used, the term includes, if it is not restricted to, the sufferings on the cross. vs. 12. *Olivet* — A ridge on the east of Jerusalem, separated from Mt. Moriah, on which the temple stood, by the valley of the brook Kidron. *A Sabbath-Day's journey* — The utmost distance that it was deemed lawful for a Jew to travel on the Sabbath, about 2000 yards.

## QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

What is meant by the former treatise? To whom is this book addressed? What else is known of Theophilus? What is meant by "his passion"? How many days elapsed between the resurrection and the ascension? For what did Jesus bid his disciples wait? What did the disciples expect him to do? (vs. 6.) What were the disciples to do for him? (vs. 8.) Where were they to bear witness? Describe the ascension? What promise accompanied it? (vs. 11.) Where did the ascension occur? How far from Jerusalem?

## COMMENTARY.

I. **The Idea of the Ascension.** — What became of the body of Jesus after its resurrection? The difficulties suggested to us by this question do not seem, at first, to have troubled the early disciples. They believed that Jesus had risen from the dead, and that he was with God in heaven; but as they did not seek to define the nature of the resurrection body, they did not think to ask about its final disappearance from the earth. Hence Matthew and the original Mark know nothing of an ascension. In John; however, something is said about the resurrection body: although the marks of the nails and the spear are visible, it is not said that Thomas actually did probe them. The body has power to pass through closed doors, and Jesus does not share the disciples' meal by the sea of Tiberias. Evidently, therefore, the body is thought of as pure spirit, and John knows of no physical ascension; none was needed, since Jesus was already in the spiritual world. In

Luke, however, the case is different. It was the physical body that rose from the grave and was seen on earth. It is true that Jesus vanishes out of the sight of the two at Emmaus; but on the other hand Jesus declares expressly, "A spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have," and to prove his real corporeality he eats before them. Obviously, therefore, the final disappearance of this real body must be accounted for somehow, and hence the idea of the ascension, which is found in Luke alone.

II. **The Place.** — According to the original Matthew and Mark, Jesus appears alive after his crucifixion only in Galilee; and the former describes his last interview with his disciples, at which "some doubted" even then. In John, four appearances are mentioned, of which the last is in Galilee, by the sea of Tiberias. In Luke, however, there are no Galilean appearances (cf. particularly Luke xxiv. 6, with parallel accounts), and Jesus is seen first and last only in and about Jerusalem. Hence Luke, who alone describes an ascension, locates the last interview between Jesus and his disciples, not like the other evangelists in Galilee, but near Jerusalem. The Gospel places the ascension "over against Bethany," — that is, probably, from the point on the top of the ridge where Bethany on its eastern slope first becomes visible, — thus agreeing fairly well with the more general statement in the Acts.

III. **The Time.** — While the third Gospel and the Acts agree regarding the fact and the place of the ascension, they are at irreconcilable variance regarding the time. In the Gospel of Luke the ascension occurs on the same day as the resurrection; but all the other accounts presuppose the lapse of considerable time, and the Acts expressly teaches that forty days intervened between the resurrection and the ascension. The probability is that in the Gospel and the Acts different traditions are followed.

It is evident, then, that the notion of the ascension is not part of the earliest belief, but arose later, when there were questionings about the nature and reality of the resurrection body and its ultimate fate; and that the only New Testament author who describes the event follows two different, and in one respect manifestly contradictory, traditions. Moreover, the explanation presents

greater difficulties to us than to those who first propounded and accepted it. For heaven is no longer conceived of as located somewhere in the sky, where God and his angels hold celestial court, and discernible were our telescopes strong enough and directed toward the right spot in the heavens. It is harder for us to believe that the body of Jesus passed as it was into heaven than for those who believed that thus Enoch and Elijah and possibly also Moses and Ezra had ascended. Furthermore, to us the idea of the ascension is entirely unnecessary, since it is based upon belief in a fact which did not really occur. The body of Jesus did not rise from the grave, but he himself passed at death, as all souls had passed and pass now, into the more immediate presence of God. The real mount of ascension for him, as for all, is the mount of duty : —

“As by each new obeisance in spirit we climb to His feet.”

And his real second advent is not in the clouds of heaven, but in the brightening light of earth.

### TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

The supposed necessity for the doctrine of the ascension, and the Old Testament precedents.

The points of difference between Luke and the other Evangelists, and between the two accounts by Luke.

The effect upon the early disciples of their belief in the immediate personal return of Jesus to the earth.

How is the idea of heaven implied in this account related to ancient ideas of cosmology?



## LESSON II.

### THE ELECTION OF MATTHIAS.

LESSON PASSAGE, — Acts I : 13-26.

**Explanatory Notes.** — vs. 13. "*Simon, the Zealot*" — The Zealots were the "extreme left" of the Pharisaic party, ready to resort to violence and even to base assassination in defence of their religious scruples. Elsewhere this Simon is called the Cananæan, which is the Aramaic equivalent of the Greek Zealot. vs. 14. "*His brethren*" — The sons, like Jesus, of Joseph and Mary. Their names are given (Matt. xiii. 55) as "James and Joseph and Simon and Judas." vs. 19. "*Akeldama*" — An Aramaic compound meaning "field of blood." This is one of many proofs that the language popularly used in Palestine at the time of Jesus was not Greek, but Aramaic, a dialect of Hebrew. vs. 20. Peter quotes from the Psalms to show that the apostasy of Judas had been foretold, and that a successor must be appointed. vs. 23. *Joseph and Matthias* — Neither of these men is known to us except from this passage. One would naturally infer from this passage that Jesus was constantly attended by a large body of disciples besides the Apostles. vs. 25. "*To his own place*" — To the place of punishment in Hades which he had prepared himself for, and which was "his own" because of his character. Note especially that vss. 18-20 are an interpolated comment by the author of the book, and do not form part of Peter's speech.

### QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

Who were the Zealots? Give the names of the brothers of Jesus? Were they his own brothers? How many were the disciples of Jesus at this time? (vs. 15.) What is said here about the death of Judas? What is the meaning of *Akeldama*? Why does Peter quote from the Psalms? What was the duty of an Apostle? What, then, was the chief qualification? (vss. 21, 22.) Describe the method of election.

## COMMENTARY.

This lesson is important principally for the light it throws upon the constitution of the early Church. There is no hierarchy here. Peter comes to the front because it was like him to take the initiative, and not because he thought himself, or was in any way recognized as, official Primate. The account of this, the first recorded meeting of the Church, shows us a pure democracy.

**I. The Electors.**—In the upper room were gathered not only the Apostles, but also the women who had been friends of Jesus during his lifetime, the members of his immediate family (except his father, Joseph, who, as tradition says, had died many years before, and his sisters, of whom we know absolutely nothing), and also a company of disciples, numbering perhaps a hundred. It is significant that the women meet here apparently on equal terms with the men. There was no “court of the women” in the Christian Church.

We are not told how it happened that the brothers of Jesus, who are said not to have believed on him during his lifetime, are found now among his disciples. It is to be observed that the list of Apostles given here agrees exactly with that given in the Third Gospel, although in Matthew and Mark Thaddeus is found instead of Judas of James. In some inferior forms of the text in Matthew, followed by the Authorized Version, the name Lebbæus appears, “whose surname was Thaddeus.” It has been conjectured that Thaddeus and Judas of James were the same person, but it is more probable that the lists disagree.

In the Authorized Version Judas is called the brother instead of the son of James. The Greek will bear either construction, although the rendering of the Revised Version is the more natural. Since this Judas was identified with the author of the Epistle of Jude, who calls himself explicitly the brother of James, the word “brother” was supplied here; but it is far more likely that the epistle purported to be written by the brother of James and Jesus, and that Judas the Apostle was the son of some James otherwise unknown.

These, then, are the electors, the one hundred and twenty fol-

lowers of Jesus, all of whom took part in the choice of a successor to Judas. In default of evidence that the women did not vote, it may fairly be supposed that they did.

II. **The Vacant Office.** — The death of Judas had caused the vacancy that was to be filled. In describing the death of Judas, the Acts follows a tradition unlike that in the Gospel of Matthew. The discrepancies between the two accounts are these: In Matthew the priests buy the field after the death of Judas; in Acts Judas buys it himself. In Matthew the traitor partly redeems his crime by the grace of remorseful suicide by hanging; in Acts there is no sign of repentance, and the wretch dies by an accidental fall. In Matthew the field is called the field of blood because bought with the price of Jesus' blood; in Acts, because the traitor's blood was shed there. The two accounts cannot be harmonized; for the common explanation that when Judas hung himself the rope broke and in falling he burst asunder is too puerile and ridiculous for consideration. Which of the two traditions is the more likely to be accurate? Undoubtedly the gross perversion of the passage from Zechariah (erroneously ascribed to Jeremiah), which, by its misinterpretation, may have favored the modifying of the tradition to conform to it, prejudices us against the account in Matthew; and the fact that Papias follows the same tradition as Luke, with much greater circumstantiality, makes in favor of the account in Acts. Yet in the sudden violent repentance of Judas and the amazing unwillingness of the priests to commit formal error while their hands were wet with innocent blood, there are psychological signs of veracity which incline us strongly toward the tradition recorded by Matthew. It should be carefully observed that by the use of the parentheses the Revised Version indicates to the eye that this account of the death of Judas is not part of Peter's speech, but is an interpolation by the author of the book, who gives, for the benefit of his non-Jewish readers, the interpretation and history of the name Akeldama.

Why was it necessary that the vacant place should be filled? Why not have eleven Apostles as well as twelve? Peter quotes two passages from the Psalms (Ps. lxi. 25, Ps. cix. 8), one of which is made to predict the traitor's death, and the other to direct the

choice of a successor. It is necessary, however, only to read both passages in their connection, especially in the Revised Version, to see that neither can by any possibility bear the interpretation here given. But the number twelve was a number of sacred completeness. There were the twelve tribes of Israel, and the twelve thrones waiting for the twelve Apostles; hence the number must be made up, and the place of Judas filled.

III. **The Qualifications of an Apostle.** — Since the Apostles were above all else to be witnesses, testifying to the words and deeds of Jesus, and particularly to the fact of his resurrection, it was necessary that an habitual follower should be chosen. If, as is sometimes asserted, this Book of the Acts was designed to harmonize the conflicting parties of Peter and Paul in the early Church, it is singular that a friend of Paul, who insisted strenuously upon his right to be called an Apostle, should here have laid down qualifications of apostleship which were entirely lacking to Paul.

IV. **The Method of Choice.** — Two men were put forward, — whether by actual vote or by the unexpressed but comprehended opinion of the assembly is not stated, — and then after prayer the lots were cast; and Matthias, upon whom the lot fell, was declared the choice of the company, and of God, who presided over the lot. The more one reflects upon this method of election, the more sagacious it appears. Perhaps some jealousies and heart-burnings might be avoided if the same method were followed nowadays. It reminds one of the English custom of “pricking for sheriffs.”

We cannot fail to contrast the simple procedure of the primitive Church with the customs of later ecclesiasticism. The organization of the Church was patterned after the synagogue among the Jews, after the guilds among the Gentiles, and at first was purely democratic and congregational. The Independents of England and the Congregationalists of New England reverted to the primitive type.

## TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

The polity of the early Church; The “primacy of Peter;” The voters; The method of choice.

Women in the Church.

Does the fact that in the New Testament certain Psalms are ascribed to David affect at all critical conclusions as to the authorship of the psalms in question?

### LESSON III.

## THE DAY OF PENTECOST.

LESSON PASSAGE, — Acts II. 1-42.

**Explanatory Notes.** — vs. 1. *The Day of Pentecost* — The Greek name for the feast beginning fifty days after the offering of the barley sheaf in Passover week. vs. 3. The idea probably is that tongues of fire diverged from a central flame. vss. 9-11. The countries are named without much reference to geographical order. The presence of Judæa in the list is evidence that this catalogue does not form part of the original outburst of wonder, but was made by the author, who was not living in Judæa. vs. 15. "*The third hour*" — It was then about nine o'clock in the morning, the first hour of public prayer, before which, especially on festival days, the stricter Jews were not accustomed to take food, much less to drink wine. vs. 16. "*The prophet Joel*" — A prophet living about 300 B. C. who, "on the occasion of a great plague of locusts, predicted the outpouring of God's spirit on all flesh, and announced a judgment of the nations" (Toy). vs. 20. *The day of the Lord* — This phrase is very common in the prophets to denote the day on which the Lord would be manifest in judgment upon evil. In Jewish thought physical phenomena are often associated with great social upheavals. vss. 25-32. The argument here may be summarized as follows: David, apparently referring to himself, speaks of a Holy One whose soul was not to be left in Hades and whose body was not to see corruption. But David died and was buried, as his sepulchre, even then preserved, bore evidence. Therefore David cannot have spoken of himself. Of whom then but of Jesus, who by virtue of his resurrection fulfilled the ancient prophecy and proved himself the Holy One of whom David spoke? vss. 34-35. That David did speak of another than himself is evident from another passage in the Psalms, where the Lord promises to set David's lord on his right hand; but David himself

has not ascended into the heaven; *Jesus has*, therefore to him must this prophecy apply, and he be David's lord, whose enemies shall yet be "the footstool of his feet." vs. 42. "*Breaking of bread*" — The fraternal meal in memory of Jesus.

### QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

What was the day of Pentecost? What were the three external signs of the coming of the Spirit? (vss. 2-4.) What is meant here by "speaking with tongues"? What charge was made? (vs. 13.) What was Peter's reply? (vs. 15) What was the third hour of the day? Who was the prophet Joel? What is Peter's argument in vss. 25-32. What is the argument in vss. 34-36? How were the people affected by Peter's sermon? (vs. 37.) Upon what conditions did Peter say that they too should receive the Holy Spirit? (vs. 38.) What is meant by a "crooked generation"? How many were added to the Church on this day of Pentecost? What was the breaking of bread?

### COMMENTARY.

This lesson describes the fulfilment, in both its parts, of "the promise of the Father."

I. **The Coming of the Spirit.** — Three signs accompanied the descent of the Spirit: the sound as of a rushing wind, the appearance as of fire, the speaking with tongues. Elsewhere in the Acts the first and third signs occur (cf. iv. 31, x. 46), but never again the second. The visible and audible signs are characteristic of Luke, who alone of the Evangelists represents the dove and the voice at the baptism of Jesus as objective facts seen and heard by all the people. The "speaking with tongues" raises a difficult but exceedingly important question. There can be no doubt whatever that this author supposed that the disciples had the power, on the day of Pentecost, of speaking foreign languages which they had never learned and of which at other times they were entirely ignorant.

But besides the intrinsic improbability of such an idea, there is not a hint anywhere else in the New Testament that such power was given to preachers of the new faith. Paul certainly did not possess it, and no one needed it more than he. There was, moreover, a "speaking with tongues" which Paul did possess (1 Cor.

xiv. 18), and which was well-known in the churches and regarded as a token of the Spirit's presence ; but study of the passages in the Epistles where this gift is described leaves no doubt that it was a sort of incoherent, ecstatic utterance, and not at all the power of speaking foreign languages intelligibly. We must say, therefore, either that this gift of tongues on the Day of Pentecost was a totally unique occurrence, never repeated when it would have been most serviceable, and useless even here since Peter can have spoken in only one language ; or that an author familiar with the *phrase*, "speaking with tongues," but unacquainted with the phenomena, read into it a new and impossible meaning. In Acts x. 46, speaking with tongues is again referred to ; and here, apparently, we have a rapt outburst of feeling like that of which Paul knew, since in the case of Cornelius there was no need of foreign languages.

Hence it may be inferred that the author of the Acts did know the ordinary gift, but regarded this of the Day of the Pentecost as something different and grander ; but may it not also be that we have here two strata of tradition whose inconsistency was not observed? Certainly this account of the descent of the Spirit in Acts is quite opposed to the teaching of the Evangelists, with the exception of Luke. In Matthew, Jesus promised his disciples power because he himself would be with them even unto the end of the world, and all power was his (xxviii. 18-20). In John, the gift of the Spirit cannot be bestowed till after the glorifying of Jesus ; but on the evening of resurrection day Jesus breathed on his disciples saying, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost" (xx. 22). Nowhere else in the New Testament is there any hint of such a spectacular bestowal of the Spirit as this, which, however, is quite in Luke's style.

II. **The Receiving of Power.**—The promise was, "Ye shall receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you." We have studied the coming of the Spirit, and turn now to the fulfilment of the second part of the promise. In Peter first the spirit of fear and denial is seen to have been displaced by the spirit of boldness and power. And because of the spirit's power within, his words were quick and powerful. Declaring unto Israel its sin in the

rejection of Jesus proved by prophecy, by resurrection, and by the coming of the Spirit, to be both Lord and Christ, he points out the one way of deliverance. Even yet repentance, a change of mind concerning Jesus, and baptism in his name, thus acknowledging him as the Christ, will avail to remove the guilt incurred by his rejection and to secure the gift of the Holy Spirit. And it is reported that as a result of Peter's preaching the little group of one hundred and twenty disciples was increased by three thousand souls.

We have already seen that this account cannot be deemed fully historical. Nevertheless there is a fact to be accounted for. How are we to explain the remarkable change which came over the disciples, who from a disappointed, terrified, fleeing group of believers, became bold, united, aggressive champions of Jesus the Christ? It is commonly assumed that the transformation is inexplicable unless we assume the fact of the actual resurrection of Jesus; but the fact could have acquired potency only as it was received into the mind as a belief, and if the belief were only present it would produce the same effect even if there were no fact to back it.

There can be no question that the disciples did believe that Jesus was risen from the dead and that he had gone into the heavens, whence he was soon to return with power and great glory to reward his faithful friends and to take fearful vengeance upon his foes. This they believed; and it was this belief, with the conviction that their exalted and mighty Master was with them still, that gave them boldness and power. And it is only natural that the first display of this firm, victorious tone should be assigned by Luke, who delighted to put things pictorially and concretely, to the first great festival after Passover, when Jerusalem was crowded with strangers. By brooding over the ideas of resurrection, present help, and immediate return, the church rose to heights of spiritual power.

### TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

The "Gift of Tongues" as it appears here and elsewhere in the New Testament.

The importance of the annual festivals to the growing thought of Jesus himself and for the propagation of "the Gospel."

The association of physical phenomena and moral crises as set forth in the Bible.

The real meaning of the passages quoted from the Psalms.

The authenticity of the report of Peter's sermon.



## LESSON IV.

### AT THE GATE BEAUTIFUL.

LESSON PASSAGE,— Acts III. 1-26.

**Explanatory Notes.** — vs. 1. "*The ninth hour*" — About three o'clock in the afternoon, at which time the evening sacrifice was regularly offered. vs. 2. "*Door . . . which is called beautiful*" — The exact locality cannot be made out, but it was probably the gate known as the Gate of Nicanor, lying on the east side of the Temple between the Court of the Gentiles and the Court of the Women. At the regular times of worship "God's poor" resorted to the Temple to beg. vs. 11. *Solomon's Porch* — This was probably a colonnade abutting on the eastern wall of the Temple, and supposed to be a relic of the ancient temple of Solomon. Here Jesus is said to have walked, and taught the people during a winter visit to Jerusalem. vs. 13. The word translated "son" in the Authorized Version is rendered "servant" in the revision. Precisely the same word is used of David in Acts iv. 25. (Observe that the entire blame for the death of Jesus rests upon the Jews, not the Romans.) vs. 14. *A murderer* — Barabbas, the insurgent. vs. 15. *The Prince of life* — The man who of all men was most truly and royally alive, and who, therefore, has led the way into life eternal, — "the first fruits of them that sleep." vs. 16. A survival of the ancient idea that there is magic power in a name. Yet there is no magic here, for the name is powerless without co-operating faith or belief in its efficacy. vs. 19-21. "*Seasons of refreshing*" etc. — Four results would follow repentance: (1) remission of sins, and consequently (2) the restored presence of the Lord bringing refreshing quiet, (3) the return of Jesus from the heavens, and (4) the renovation of Jerusalem and of the universe. vs. 22. "In Deuteronomy [xviii. 15] the connection shows that the word 'prophet' is used collectively,

the reference being to the whole line of prophets as interpreters of the divine will [in contrast with heathen soothsayers] and intermediaries between God and the people" (Toy). vs. 25. "*In thy seed*" — It is doubtful whether the passage in Genesis can bear the meaning which the New Testament writers find in it. The idea seems to be that Israel shall become a standard of blessing for the nations, so favored that the best other nations can ask for themselves is a blessing like Israel's. vs. 26. The only true blessing is found in turning away from iniquity.

### QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

What was the ninth hour? To what custom of beggars is reference made in the second verse? Where was the Beautiful Gate? Tell the story of the cure. What was Solomon's Porch? Who did Peter say had healed the lame man? How was the cure performed? (vs. 16.) How does this use of "the name" differ from magic? How does Peter excuse the Jews for their share in the death of Jesus? (vs. 17. Cf. 1 Tim. i. 13.) By whom had the sufferings and death of Jesus been foretold? What four results would flow from repentance? What is the real meaning of the passage quoted from "Moses"? Can it rightly be applied to Jesus alone? What is the probable meaning of the promise to Abraham? What does Peter regard as the only true blessing? (vs. 26.)

### COMMENTARY.

I. **The Healing of the Cripple.** — The opening verses of the lesson illustrate what have been ascertained to be wise methods of relief. A beggar asks for money; Peter gives him no money, but, first seeking to establish personal relations with him ("fastening his eyes upon him, said, Look on us"), bids him rise and be strong. The encouraging command is accompanied by an inspiring personal look and by a helping hand (vs. 7). It is a good sign that the man went into the temple with those who had helped him, praising God that now he was able to take care of himself. Yet all external aids — the personal look, the appeal, the helping hand — are apt to be unavailing unless a man hears in the human

call a divine voice to which the best in his own nature gives response.

Peter and John were going up to the Temple to pray. At this time, then, the Christians were not alive to the fact, which Paul realized so vividly, that there was an utter inconsistency between the new faith and the old. They were altogether like their fellow Jews except in one respect: they believed that the Messiah, whom all expected, had actually come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth; but they did not see, till Paul made them, what was involved in the acceptance of Jesus as the Christ. And the unbelieving Jews did not understand then that the new piece would rend the old garment, and the new wine burst the ancient flasks. It had not yet become necessary for the disciples to go forth without the camp unto a new altar and an unlineaged priest.

The story of the cure is told graphically, and with unusual realism. The look of general appeal sharpens into particular beseeching when Peter bids him, "Look on us." His countenance falls when Peter begins, "Silver and gold have I none." Although communism prevailed among the Christians, and much property was laid at the apostles' feet, Peter and John had not profited by it; they had no silver or gold. Strength comes when the cripple tries to rise in obedience to Peter's command and by the help of his hand. That the author says, "his feet and ankle bones received strength," has sometimes been thought an indication that the author was really Luke, *the physician*; but the attempt to discover medical terms in the Third Gospel and the Acts has been carried to a ridiculous extreme. This seems a quite natural thing for any one to say, as the words used are by no means strictly or exclusively technical. So far as the miracle is concerned, all "rationalistic" explanations ought in fairness to be abandoned. There is nothing in the narrative to indicate that the man was shamming, or that he had been gradually getting stronger, but did not know it till at the apostle's bidding he tried to rise. It is impossible at this distance to tell what, if any, grain of fact may be in the narrative; but of course the story as it stands is quite as incredible as the scores of similar miracles related in ancient and modern records of the Church, which hardly any one now thinks of believing.

**II. Peter's Address to the People.** — The central theme here, as always, is the resurrection of Jesus. That the cripple was healed was due to the power of Jesus, who had been crucified, but whom God had raised and glorified. That the Jews had put him to death was because of their ignorance, — and indeed it was written already in prophecy that he should die so ; but repentance would insure forgiveness and restoration. Moses had promised that a prophet should arise in the latter days, and the promise was fulfilled in Jesus. God had promised that Israel should be blessed, and that promise was now to be accomplished in the repentance of Israel.

So far we have found in the Acts no hint of the tendency to lift Jesus out of the ranks of humanity. He is called, as David is, the servant of God ; he is spoken of as " Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God." He was unhesitatingly believed to be the Christ, fulfilment of all Messianic prophecy ; but there were no theories about pre-existence and incarnation. The one phrase which seems to describe a unique being is in the fifteenth verse of this chapter, " the prince of life." The word translated " prince," found in the New Testament only in Acts and Hebrews, means primarily leader or founder. Jesus is the prince of our salvation (Heb. ii. 10), because, having been made perfect through suffering, he leads us in the way of salvation ; he is the prince of our faith (Heb. xii. 2), because, having shown himself a perfect example of faith, he is the leader of all who walk by faith ; he is prince and Saviour (Acts v. 21), because salvation is to be found only in the way in which he leads ; he is the prince of life, because in him was life more abundant, and his disciples are also being led by him into life ; he is the prince of life, in other words, because life was pre-eminently his, and to his disciples he imparts the secret of life.

### TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

The Temple, its construction and history.

Ancient belief in the magical use of names.

The logical results to a first-century Jew of faith in Jesus as the Christ.

The literary quality of vss. 1-11.

"The prince of life."

## LESSON V.

### THE FIRST PERSECUTION.

LESSON PASSAGE, — Acts IV 1-31.

**Explanatory Notes.** — vs. 1. *The Captain of the Temple* — An official of high rank to whom was intrusted “the chief superintendence of the arrangements for preserving order in and around the temple.” *The Sadducees* — The aristocrats of Israel, mostly priests, opposed to the Pharisees in religion and in national policy. Accepting only the written Law, ascribed to Moses, as authoritative, they denied the traditional interpretations and refinements of the Scribes as well as the doctrines found only in the later books, particularly the entire system of angelology and the resurrection of the dead. Less tenaciously conservative than the Pharisees, they were open to foreign alliances, and were not so bitter against the Roman rule. vs. 3. It was contrary to Jewish usage to hold a trial at night, hence the apostles were kept in prison till morning. vs. 6. *Annas* — High-priest from A.D. 7 to A.D. 15; but at this time Caiaphas held the office. *John and Alexander* — Of these men nothing further is known. vs. 11. Cf. Ps. cxviii. 22, 23. The original meaning of the proverb is that Israel, disdained by the other nations of the earth, had been given by God the most conspicuous and important place in the organization of human society. Peter applies the proverb to Jesus, rejected by God’s builders in Israel, but established by the resurrection as the only foundation-stone upon which Israel’s prosperity could rest. vs. 25, 26. The passage in Psalms (ii. 1, 2) describes a conspiracy of subject nations against Israel and its King, the Lord’s Messiah. “The psalm is regarded by the earlier Jewish commentators as Messianic,” and Peter finds the fulfilment of its prophecy in the case of Jesus, whom he believes to be the Messiah. Notice that Luke alone, here and in Ev. xxiii. 7-12, makes mention of Herod’s part in the condemnation of Jesus. vs. 27. *Herod* — Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee from the death of his father, Herod the Great, to A.D. 39 (cf. Luke xxiii. 7 sqq.). *Pilate* — Roman procurator in Judæa, 26-36 A.D.

## QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

Where were the disciples speaking to the people? What apostles are referred to? What was the occasion of their preaching? Who was the captain of the temple? Who were the Sadducees? Why did the Sadducees object to the preaching of the resurrection? At what hour was the arrest made? (cf. iii. i.) Why was trial deferred? Before what court were the apostles brought? Who were Annas and Caiaphas? Describe the examination. What was the decision of the Sanhedrin? (vs. 17, 18.) What was the answer of the apostles? Why did the court refrain from punishment? (vs. 21.) Where did the apostles go after their release? (vs. 23.) In vs. 27, which Herod is meant? For what did the disciples pray, — for immunity or for boldness? (vs. 29.) What was the sign of the Spirit's presence? (vs. 31.)

## COMMENTARY.

I. **The Arrest.** — Up to this time the Christians have not been interfered with; but now the commotion in the Temple affords an occasion to the Sadducees, who must have chafed under the preaching of the Apostles. For one of the chief points in dispute between Sadducees and Pharisees was the doctrine of resurrection from the dead. If we except the uncertain passage in Job (xix. 25-27), there is no hint of such a doctrine earlier than the book of Daniel, the latest in the Old Testament. Belief in it grew out of hope for Messiah's kingdom, in whose earthly glory all Jews must share, — those in Sheol as well as those on earth at its coming. Hence the Sadducees, who did not share the Messianic hopes of the Pharisees, and who acknowledged the divine authority of nothing in the Old Testament except the books of the Law, were opposed to the doctrine both on religious and on political grounds. Yet if the resurrection were a reality in the case of Jesus, it might be also in the case of all Jews; hence the Sadducees were especially hostile to the Christians, whose constant declaration was that Jesus was the Messiah, and that God had raised him from the dead. The disciples seemed to be playing into the hands of the Pharisees; hence the chief enemies of Jesus were silent now, if not friendly, and the Sadducees took the lead in persecuting the Church. Yet in spite of the arrest, perhaps in consequence of it so strong was popular feeling against the Sadducees, the number of believers increased from three thousand to five thousand.

II. **The Court.** — In the morning the Sanhedrin was convened to try Peter and John. The origin and make-up of this, the most

important judicial body in Palestine, cannot be determined with certainty. Since the local courts are called by the same name (Matt. x. 17) it is probable that the great Sanhedrin was originally the governing body of Jerusalem, and its members were called the "Elders." As Jerusalem became the metropolis, the influence of the court grew; and as religion became the absorbing concern of the nation, it was natural that in the local assembly the priestly order should have place and prominence. Thus the Sanhedrin appears as a sacerdotal organization, although its origin is still indicated by the retention of the elders with the chief priests. Later on, with the rise of Phariseism, the scribes were represented in the body. The periphrasis in Mark xiv. 53 ("the chief priests and the elders and the scribes") seems to preserve trustworthy evidence of the growth and final composition of the Sanhedrin. Election to membership seems to have been by co-optation. At the time of Jesus the court consisted of seventy members and the high-priest, who was the presiding officer. At this time Caiaphas was high-priest (18-36), and not Annas as is stated in vs. 6; but the blunder is more valuable than the exact statement would have been, since in the Gospel ascribed to Luke the same mistake is found. A common error helps prove identity of authorship. Before this august tribunal, then, the highest in the land, the humble followers of Jesus were put on trial.

III. **Peter's Defence.** — The Emperor of Germany is reported to have said recently, "The best defence is a thrust." So Peter seems to have thought; for beginning with a keen sarcasm, — "It is for a *good deed* that we are held as criminals," — he passes immediately to an affirmation of the resurrection of Jesus, in the avowal of whose lordship and Messianic name salvation must be found. It is not strange that the Sanhedrin marvelled at the boldness of the Galilean fishermen, and hearing again the ring of the voice they had silenced in death, took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.

IV. **The Sentence.** — From this point on the narrative fails to win confidence, for it can hardly be deemed credible that the Sanhedrin acknowledged the reality of the alleged miracle. Yet the same men who are now described as so confounded by the presence of the cripple who had been healed that they could say nothing, have been previously represented as tacitly admitting the cure, since their only question was as to the name and power by which the miracle was wrought. Fearing the people, they did not dare to inflict punishment, but only charged the apostles to keep silence and do no wonderful works in the future. The answer of Peter and John has often been compared with that of Socrates (Apol. § 29), and of Luther at the Diet of Worms. Whether

the apostles actually said this or not, is of the slightest consequence ; that the words convey their principle of conduct is undeniable.

V. **Their Own Company.** — When the apostles came again into the company of their friends, all turned to prayer. That was well ; for the situation of the Church, condemned to silence by the chief tribunal of the country, was one of the facts that, in Emerson's phrase, needed to be "looked at from the highest point of view." It is useless to inquire whether the prayer here given is a prayer actually in use at a later time in the Church, which Luke has transferred by a harmless anachronism to this early date, or whether it only represents the author's idea of what the Church may be supposed to have thought and said at this crisis ; but it is obvious that the Church cannot have had so early in its history a common liturgical form. In fact, up to this very hour, there had been no occasion for a prayer in the face of persecution. Equally unhistorical with the prayer must be the account of the sign which followed. But if we cannot believe that the place wherein they were gathered was shaken, we cannot doubt that they did receive anew the spirit of boldness and power. The prayer is remarkable in that it contains no petition for release from persecution, but only the fervent desire that they, the servants of God, may receive courage and assurance by the working of the Spirit. They pray, not for a sword or load more light, "but for a stronger arm." When men pray in such a spirit, something is sure to come of it.

### TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

The religious and political attitude of the Sadducees, contrasted with that of the Pharisees.

Reasons for the Pharisees' hatred of Jesus and indifference toward his followers

The nature and origin of the Sanhedrin.

Liturgical forms in the Early Church.



## LESSON VI.

### HONOR AMONG BRETHREN.

LESSON PASSAGE, — Acts IV. 32-V. 11.

**Explanatory Notes.** — vs. 33. *Great grace* — The phrase looks both toward men and toward God. The apostles had favor with the people because they were in gracious relation with God. vs. 34. The tenses in the Greek denote habitual or repeated action. vs. 36. *Barnabas* — The word means Son of Consolation, or Exhortation. According to a well-known Hebrew usage, the meaning is that he was the personification of the quality mentioned. The story of his welcoming Paul when the young disciple, so well remembered as a relentless persecutor, first visited the Church at Jerusalem, and the account of his companionship with Paul on the first missionary journey, show that both as private friend and as public representative he deserved the title given him. He was also a *Levite*; that is, he was descended from one of the priests of inferior grade. Originally all priests were called Levites; but as worship became centralized at Jerusalem the priests who ministered at that shrine of Yahwe assumed superior rights and privileges; and the term Levites was applied to the priests coming from other shrines, who were given a subordinate place in the temple service. He came from *Cyprus*, an island still bearing the same name, in the eastern part of the Mediterranean. There were Jews on the island as early as the time of the Maccabees; but more must have come after Augustus gave Herod an interest in the copper mines. It is probable that the field which Barnabas sold was in Cyprus. vs. 1. *Ananias and Sapphira* — Members of the Jerusalem church, not mentioned outside of this chapter. vs. 3. Notice that while Peter says here that Satan had put the plan of deceit into the heart of Ananias, he says, in vs. 4, “Why hast *thou* put this thing in thy heart?” and it appears from vs. 2 that it was a fraud deliberately planned by husband and wife (cf. vs. 9). vs. 7. The body seems not to have been taken home, but to have been buried hastily in some place of interment outside the city. The young men were gone three hours.

## QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

In what three respects were the disciples one? (vs. 32.) What was the burden of the apostles' preaching? What is meant by "great grace"? What is mentioned as the chief evidence, or cause, of this grace? (vs. 34, note "for.") Were the disciples all poor people? Why was Joseph called Barnabas? What is meant by such expressions as "Sons of this world" (Luke xvi. 8), "Sons of the resurrection" (Luke xx. 36), "Sons of thunder" (Mark iii. 17), "Son of Gehenna" (Matt. xxiii. 15)? Who were the Levites? Where was Cyprus? What is known of Ananias and Sapphira? What was their sin? Were they obliged to give all, or even part, to the Church? (vs. 4.) What is said to have been the fate of the two hypocrites? What was the result of their death in the Church and the community? How much truth do you think there is in this story?

## COMMENTARY.

1. **Honor Kept among Brethren.**—There appears to have been an idea in the early Church that the Church was Christ reincarnated. As the spirit came upon Jesus at his baptism, giving him power to do mighty works, so after his death that spirit descended upon his disciples in the Church, bestowing upon them the same powers that he had possessed. Paul even goes so far as to say, after speaking of the many members yet one body, "so also is (not the Church but) *Christ*" (1 Cor. xii. 12). And there can be no reasonable doubt that the Church in Jerusalem strove to be only the enlargement of the apostolic band in which the spirit of Jesus prevailed. As there had been a common purse among the immediate followers of Jesus, so there was a common purse among the disciples in Jerusalem. As Peter and John had left all to follow him, so those who would be counted among his disciples now were expected to make common cause in view of the approaching end of the age. As they were one in heart and soul, they desired to be one in purse also.

Yet it is to be carefully observed that even in spite of the hard command laid by Jesus upon the rich young ruler (Luke xviii. 22) this community of goods was not enforced as a requirement. The giving was purely voluntary. But the end of all things was at hand; Jesus was speedily to return to set up a new kingdom, and why should they who were so soon to enter upon their treasures in heaven care about earthly possessions? It was far better to make friends by means of their money, even if sympathy with their needy brethren were not present as a motive. Therefore we find in the Church a purely voluntary communism, based upon the example of the apostolic band, inspired by that sympathy with the

poor which Jesus had shown so conspicuously, and made easier by jubilant belief in the near advent of Jesus, who should lead his followers into the enjoyment of the true riches.

Evidently, therefore, whatever views may be entertained regarding the authority of the apostolic Church, what was voluntary then cannot be obligatory now. And in fact the experiment proved disastrous at Jerusalem; for in the account of Paul's life we discover that he often asked aid for the poor brethren in the mother Church; and the Ebionites are said to have claimed that their extreme poverty was due to the early communism of the Church. Yet the principle is sound. Whatever a man has is his only in trust as a steward for God, from whom he has received it, and for his brethren, to whom it rightfully belongs. But the question is, whether that very ideal of stewardship does not demand that he shall keep the property which he can use to better advantage than any one else. But for the existence of great capital, controlled by a single directing mind, the present industrial condition, with cheapness of production and facility of transportation, could never have been attained; and there is no evidence that the day has even yet gone by for industrial individualism. A man with large property may often serve mankind more truly by keeping and using it wisely himself, under the guidance of the Christian ideal, than by dissipating it in manifold charities. There may be cowardice and selfishness in attempting to shirk the responsibility which always attaches to the possession of money, by putting it out of one's hands. The principle of those first disciples was true and lasting; whether or no the application which they made of it was right, and if right then legitimate now, is an entirely different question.

There was honor among the brethren. The common purse was held by the apostles, and its contents were distributed as each disciple had need. The community trusted the honor of the apostles, and each brother trusted his neighbor's honor. And the sight of such a blessed brotherhood gave power to the preaching of the apostles and increased the favor with which the Church was regarded by the people. When honor is the law of the Church, power is with the word of the preacher.

**II. Honor Broken.**—In dark contrast with the governing temper of the Church, and in sharp antithesis to the conduct of Barnabas, who is referred to merely as an illustration of the general custom, is the story of Ananias and Sapphira. Howson's comment here is worth quoting: "When those who are united together in the most sacred of bonds have joined together in the commission of crime, then indeed we have an illustration of the true proverb that 'the worst thing in the world is a corruption of the best.'" It

is one of the most darkly suggestive hints as to the home life of the married couple, that they could talk over and deliberately plan together a piece of meanness. For the fault lay not in their keeping back a part of the price, but in their pretending to have given all. Peter expressly declares that the property was their own, both before it was sold and afterwards; but the attempt to gain credit in the eyes of the Church for turning in the entire proceeds, while secretly retaining a part for their own private use, was arrant hypocrisy and meanness. When Ananias brought the money to the apostles he was acting a lie. Peter's question led him to put the lie into words; and punishment was swift and awful. When three hours later Sapphira came in, Peter asked her, as he pointed to the money still lying at his feet, or perhaps named the sum, whether it was *for so much* that the field was sold. She, too, spoke the acted lie, and was stricken as her husband had been. "And great fear came upon the whole Church, and upon all that heard these things."

What can we say about the truthfulness of this story? It has often been suggested that the sternness of Peter's tone, and the awed silence of the shocked assembly, together with the smiting of an aroused conscience, are sufficient to account for the death of Ananias on purely psychological grounds. One might wish to believe the explanation, on account of the more favorable light in which it places the character of the two; but did both Ananias and Sapphira have heart-disease? At best this is nothing more than a rationalistic explanation; and it is far better to say that the story is a legend, with perhaps some basis in fact which it is impossible now to discover. But that such a legend could have arisen and been preserved in the Church, is in itself quite as significant as the event itself would have been had it really occurred; for it shows that the spirit animating the Church was in truth a *holy* spirit, — a spirit of holiness and honor. Nothing could show more convincingly the high ethical ideal of the Church than the prevalence in it of a belief that for an offence so trivial, as it seems to us, such a frightful judgment was inflicted. The story is valuable, therefore, principally for the side-light it throws upon the high moral standards of the primitive Christians. The Church was a brotherhood of honor.

### TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

The communistic ideal.

The nature and consequences of communism in the Church at Jerusalem.

The religion of honor.

The revelations of a legend.

## LESSON VII.

### THE SECOND ARREST.

Acts V. 12-42.

**Explanatory Notes.**— vs. 12. *Solomon's Porch*— See note on iii. 11. vs. 14. *To the Lord*— We should expect to find that they were added “to the Church,” but “the Church is the body of Christ,” and in Pauline thought the believer is in Christ as well as in the Church. vs. 16. *Vexed with unclean spirits*— That is, the demented. vs. 17. *The high priest*— Caiaphas. *The Sadducees*— See note on iv. 1. vs. 20. *This life*— Possibly this means life in the spiritual order to which the angel belonged and in whose existence the Sadducees disbelieved. v. 21. *About daybreak*— As soon as the gates of the temple were opened, when the morning sacrifice was offered. *The Council and all the senate*— By this rendering, the translators have concealed a serious difficulty in the original, which reads the Sanhedrin and all the senate. Since the words which he employs are identical in meaning, it is probable that Luke erroneously supposed that the “senate” was a different body from the Sanhedrin and more comprehensive. vs. 24. See note on iv. 1. vs. 28. *Straitly*— Strictly; the exact phrase is “we charged you with a charge,” modelled after a Hebrew idiom. See iv. 18. vs. 30. *On a tree*— Because the cross was made of wood, as we still say *axle-tree*, etc. vs. 32. The witness by the words of the apostles was corroborated by the witness of the spirit in the hearts of all who obeyed God. vs. 34. *Gamaliel*.— A leader among the Pharisees, said to have been grandson to the great Hillel, and to have died eighteen years before the destruction of Jerusalem. He was the teacher of Paul, and according to one tradition, of Barnabas also. vs. 36. *Theudas*— An insurgent chief who was put to death by the Romans about 45 A.D. The reference to him in this speech of Gamaliel at least ten years earlier is a palpable anachronism. vs. 37. *Judas of Galilee*— A fanatical leader who headed a revolt at the time of the census by Quirinius (about A.D. 7), and who, therefore, lived before and not after Theudas. vs. 41. *The Name*— This clearly shows that the book dates from a time when “the Name” had become a technical formula in the trials of Christians. Confession of the name (of Christian) was deemed sufficient ground for condemnation even though no actual crime were charged (cf. 1 Peter iv. 14).

## QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

Where was Solomon's porch? What was the occasion of fear? (vs. 11.) To what extreme did people carry their superstitious belief in the power of the apostles? (vs. 15.) Who are meant by those "vexed with unclean spirits"? Who was the high priest at this time? Who were the Sadducees? Why were they "jealous" of the apostles? How were the apostles released from prison? What is meant by "the words of this Life"? When were the temple gates opened? How does the "council" differ from the "senate"? Who was "the captain of the temple"? Who were the "chief priests"? Who were the Pharisees? What is known of Gamaliel? What was the substance of his counsel? When did Theudas live? Who was Judas of Galilee? What punishment was inflicted upon the apostles? What is the significance of "the Name"?

## COMMENTARY.

I. **The Arrest.** — Having given a wonderful example of the power of the apostles to smite, the author now shows that they were endowed with equally marvellous power to heal. The power of the spirit in judgment warned off the unrighteous, but the same power manifest in works of healing attracted the sincere and godly. And popular superstition rose to such a height that even the shadow of Peter was supposed to possess curative power. Jesus was believed to have the power of working miracles without word or touch or even presence, and hence it was only natural that his apostles should be thought equally endowed. Luke does not say, indeed, that any were made whole by the falling upon them of Peter's shadow, but the inference is that what the people believed could be done he believed was done. It is futile, in the present state of our knowledge, to talk about hypnotic or telepathic influence, especially as such an explanation, if valid, would destroy utterly the miraculous character of the event; and it is better to say merely that we have here a legendary account out of which we are unable now to extract the grain of truth, if any, that it may contain. It is probable that both Jesus and his followers had the power which strong personalities often have over the weak and insane, and this may account for the rise of legends which ascribe to them indiscriminate gifts of healing. Undoubtedly the apostles believed that they possessed unusual influence over disease; undoubtedly people flocked to them, as they flock to some Roman Catholic shrines nowadays, and went away declaring themselves cured; so the apostles became increasingly prominent, the church grew in numbers, and the attention of the authorities was again called to the new sect. And this time, as before, it is the Sadducees, jealous of the apostles' control over the people, and offended by their preaching of the resurrection, who arrest and imprison, not Peter and John alone, but the whole apostolic band.

**II. The Deliverance.**— One of the characteristics of both the Gospel of Luke and the Acts is a fondness for angelology. There is no possibility of twisting this into a natural occurrence by calling in the aid of an opportune earthquake or a secret friend without impugning the veracity of our author. He certainly believed in the real existence of angels and in their interpositions in behalf of saints who needed assistance. And his credulity in this respect cannot help prejudicing us against his trustworthiness as an accurate observer in other matters. In the morning the apostles, found preaching in the Temple according to the command of the angel, were again arrested, — without violence, however, for the people liked the apostles and hated the Pharisees, — and put on trial before the council.

**III. The Trial.**— The gravamen of the charge is disobedience to the express order of the Sanhedrin. It is a case of contempt of court as well as of preaching designed to stir up enmity against the rulers of the people. And Peter's answer is a reiteration of the doctrine for which previously he had been condemned, and a new declaration that "we ought to obey God rather than men." Maddened by the answer, the Sadducees were on the point of condemning them to death when Gamaliel arose, a leader among the Pharisees, whose character and favor with the people gave weight to his words. The substance of his speech was a plea for toleration: speaking as one who believed in resurrection if not in the resurrection of Jesus, and to whom the doctrine of the apostles as he understood it seemed not very far astray, he pleaded that only time could tell whether the Christians were in the right. Therefore the only course was simply to let the apostles alone, in full assurance that if false the sect would speedily vanish away as others had done before them, while if true, it would be a fearful thing to be found fighting against God.

Two arguments have been advanced against the authenticity of this speech attributed to Gamaliel, based upon its historical anachronisms and the supposed attitude of the Pharisees toward the Church. The anachronisms may be called past debate. Josephus relates that in the procuratorship of Cuspius Fadus (A. D. 44- ?) "a certain magician whose name was Theudas persuaded a great part of the people to take their effects with them and follow him to the river Jordan; for he told them that he was a prophet and would by his own command divide the river and give them an easy passage over." But Fadus swept down upon him, slew many of his followers, and carried the prophet's head to Jerusalem as a sign of victory. But this occurred a considerable time after the speech of Gamaliel; hence it has sometimes been assumed, without a shred of supporting evidence, that there was another and an earlier Theudas to whom reference was made. Such an assumption could be justified only if the Book of Acts were a first-rate historical source; but from what we have already learned of its trustworthiness, we can hardly deny that here Luke, writing at least

thirty and probably sixty years after the event he is describing, has been guilty of an anachronism. This conclusion is of value as showing that this, like the other speeches in the book, cannot be a verbatim report of what was said, but at best gives only its substance. In the case of Judas the Galilean, whose outbreak at the time of the census by Quirinius is described by Josephus (Antiq. xviii. i. 1), the only difficulty is that he is spoken of as having arisen after Theudas instead of before him. He was remembered as the leader of the party among the Jews who finally caused the great insurrection of A. D. 66, which was led by his son, Menahem. It is barely possible that the error may have arisen from a hasty reading of two successive paragraphs in Josephus (Antiq. xx. v. 2); if this hypothesis be correct, it would be of very material aid in fixing the date of Acts.

A second argument against the authenticity of this speech of Gamaliel is based upon the notion that if Gamaliel were disposed toward the Christians as here represented, it is incredible that his disciple Paul can have been so violent a persecutor. But does a pupil never outstrip his teacher? Moreover, Paul saw clearly the logical inferences from the resurrection of Jesus, and with youthful energy acted while Gamaliel was inclined to temporize and theorize.

While, therefore, we cannot regard this speech as anything more than an attempt by the author to put into the mouth of Gamaliel words which he might have uttered on this particular occasion, there seems little reason to question that the sentiments of it were such as *at this time* prevailed among the Pharisees. Not yet startled by the preaching of Stephen or offended by indifference, much less hostility, to their religious rites and scruples, they were only too glad to have the people hear teachings which ran counter to the principles of the Sadducees, and so strengthened the Pharisees in their main position. Luke has followed a reliable tradition, yet the form is all his own.

**IV. The Judgment.** — As on the previous trial, the apostles were forbidden to speak in the name of Jesus; but this time, as a punishment for their disobedience to the former injunction and by way of warning, they were scourged. But after the scourging they went forth rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer; and after the order of silence they ceased not daily at home and in the temple to preach Jesus as the Christ.

## TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

- Indications in this lesson of the date of the Acts.
- The angelology of Luke in the Gospel and the Acts.
- The nature and value of the speeches in Acts.
- The anachronisms in the speech of Gamaliel.
- The soundness of Gamaliel's principle.
- The disobedience of the apostles to rightful authority.



## LESSON VIII.

### STEPHEN THE DEACON.

LESSON PASSAGE, — Acts VI. 1-15.

**Explanatory Notes.** — vs. 1. *Grecian Jews* — Better, Hellenists, as in the margin of the Revised Version. There seem to have been two classes of these: (a) Proselytes to Judaism, and (b) Jews of the Dispersion, — that is, Jews by race who had been born and educated outside of Palestine. Affected to some degree by Greek culture, and speaking the Greek language, the Hellenists, although hated outside of Palestine for their exclusiveness, were despised by the Palestinian Jews because they were not strict enough. *The Hebrews* were the home-keeping Jews, who from the days of the Maccabees had inherited bitter hatred for everything that savored of Greek civilization. *The daily ministration* — The charitable relief for the poor of the Christian community. vs. 5. *The seven men* — Of Stephen and Philip we shall learn more in this lesson, and subsequently; but history is silent about the rest. It has been supposed, but on insufficient evidence, that all were Hellenists. vs. 6. *Laid their hands on them* — A ceremony borrowed from Judaism to designate formally and publicly the person upon whom office was conferred. vs. 9. *Libertines* — “Jews by birth who, brought by the Romans — particularly under Pompey — as prisoners of war to Rome, were afterward emancipated and had returned home” (Meyer). It seems probable that in this verse only one synagogue is referred to, frequented by freedmen from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia, and Asia. *Cyrene* — A city of the district in Northern Africa corresponding nearly to the modern Tripolis. *Alexandria* — The chief city of Egypt. *Cilicia* — A division of Asia Minor, bordering on the Mediterranean. It was in Tarsus of Cilicia that Paul was born. *Asia* — The application of this geographical term in the New Testament is quite uncertain; it may be used in the earlier and popular sense, including only the Ægean coastland (Mysia, Lydia, Caria), or it may cover the entire Roman province in its larger extent, containing also Phrygia. vs. 12. *The elders* — Evidently a governing body of some sort; but

ignorance of the methods of Jewish municipal organization is so great that explicit statements are unjustifiable even if we may suppose Luke to have used the term with perfect accuracy. Possibly the Sanhedrin is meant. *The Council*—The Sanhedrin. vs. 13. *This holy place*—The temple where, it appears, the Sanhedrin was assembled. vs. 15. *The face of an angel*—Cf. Ex. xxxiv. 29, *seq.*

## QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

Who were the "Grecian Jews"? By what other name are they called? Who were the Hebrews? What was "the daily ministration"? What was the occasion of complaint? What plan did the apostles propose? What were the three qualifications required of the deacons? How were the new officers chosen? What may indicate that all were Hellenists? How were they chosen? What did the laying on of hands imply? Who were the "Libertines"? Where was Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia, Asia? What is meant by "the elders"? Before what "council" was Stephen brought? What was the charge against him? How did Stephen appear?

## COMMENTARY.

I. **Dissension in the Church.**—In describing pure religion (or religious worship) as visiting the fatherless and the widows in their affliction and keeping oneself unspotted from the world, the Epistle of James is describing the apostolic Church, with its two chief notes of charity and purity. The Church came naturally by both traits, owing to its Jewish origin. Purity of life had long been a Jewish ideal growing more intense and narrow under Pharisaic influence. Since the exile, when many of those who returned were miserably poor, almsgiving had increased in importance as a religious duty, and was even identified with righteousness. Alms "deliver from death" (Tobit iii. 10) and "make an atonement for sin" (Eccl. iii. 30). And as the idea of almsgiving was inherited from contemporary Judaism, so the methods of its administration must have been modelled after those employed in strictly Jewish communities. At first the apostles were almoners, but as increase of numbers in the Church added to their burdens in the ministry of the Word, the greater number of dependents also made heavier demands upon them in charitable visitation. It happened, therefore, that some of the Hellenistic widows, whose difference from the Hebrews may have caused them to be more easily overlooked, were neglected;

and their friends, doubtless ascribing the oversight to intentional neglect on the part of the apostles, began to murmur among themselves. But before the murmuring had time to grow into open complaint the apostles, with commendable promptness, called a meeting of the disciples and laid the whole matter before them, pleading that they might be released from this part of the work, and that seven men might be appointed to take entire charge of the charities of the Church.

**II. The Appointment of the Seven.** — The necessary qualifications were that they should be men of good reputation, who would perform their duties in the right spirit, not mechanically, and with wisdom. Although these men are not called deacons, yet the Greek word with which our English title is cognate is used of their "ministry," and it is almost certain that we have here the traditional account of the origin of the order of deacons in the Church. It must be remembered, however, that this may be only a reading back into earlier times of a state of things which did not exist till very much later, and that many points relating to the origin and co-ordination of the assumed "three orders" in the Church are still in grave dispute. The time has not yet come when it is safe to speak dogmatically on either side of the controversy respecting deacons and presbyters in the apostolic Church. What is important, however, is the fact that these seven men are chosen by the whole body of the disciples; and if this narrative represents only the feeling and custom of later times, the fact becomes even more significant, because testifying to the longer continuance of the democratic ideal. As was said in a previous lesson, the laying on of hands was not for the conferring of the spirit, since one of the necessary qualifications of election was that the candidate should be full of the spirit, but only in conformity with the ordinary Jewish practice, to make public recognition of those to whom the office was entrusted.

With the appointment of the seven discontent was allayed, but the alleged neglect of the Hellenistic widows was only an occasion of strife, — the real cause lay much deeper and remained untouched by this wise expedient. Since the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, who had tried to force upon Israel Greek customs and worship, the more loyal Jews had cherished deep enmity against Greek civilization and everything pertaining to it. Therefore the Hellenists, even though Jews by birth, were suspected and dis-

liked. And they in their turn, having imbibed something of the Greek liberality of thought and freedom of life, and resenting the attitude toward them of the stricter brethren, could not be in perfect sympathy with the Hebrews. Prejudices are hard to remove, and there was such a world-wide difference between the typical Greek and the typical Pharisaic Jew, that when the Hellenists and the Hebrews came together in the new Church, trouble was sure to arise. In these two parties of the Church in Jerusalem lies the history of the future ; it was the Hellenists, with their wider horizon and freer energy, who saved the Church from the narrowness in which the Hebrews would have held it fast, and who made of it a universal religion. The Hebrews inherited the traditional, the Hellenists the constructive element of the thought of Jesus. The history of the Church from this time on is the history of unfolding Hellenism.

**Stephen the Deacon.**—Stephen was appointed “to serve tables,” but he had a ministry of the word, also. We can only conjecture the character of the hot disputes in the synagogue of the freedmen, but when we read that the people and the scribes, hitherto friendly to the Church, were stirred up against him, and that he was charged with speaking impious words against the customs of Moses, we perceive at once that this Hellenistic deacon must have spoken more like Jesus than any one of his Hebrew apostles. According to Mark (xiv. 58) Jesus was accused of threatening to destroy the temple and build another in its place. The witnesses are called false witnesses, but if the record of the speech of Stephen is at all authentic, he more than vindicated the truth of the charge. In fact, the principles of Jesus, and still more the method of his thought to which this young Hellenist had fallen heir, were subversive of Judaism, because sapping the foundations upon which the whole system rested. It is always the enemies and not the friends of a new idea who see most clearly to what it will lead.

### TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

The origin and influence of the “Dispersion.”

The two distinguishing marks of the apostolic Church.

The development and administration of charity in Jewish communities.

The effect of Judaism upon the organization of the Church.

The three-fold ministry.

Hellenists and Hebrews in the Church.

## LESSON IX.

### STEPHEN THE PROPHET.

LESSON PASSAGE, — Acts VII. 1-53.

**Explanatory Notes.** — vs. 2. According to Gen. xii. 1, the command came to Abraham while he was in Haran; but in Gen. xv. 7 there is an intimation of a previous call. There is a probable, but not a certain, discrepancy between the accounts in Acts and in Genesis. vs. 4. In Genesis it is said that Terah was seventy years old when Abraham was born, and that he died in Haran at the age of two hundred and five. But Abraham is also said to have been only seventy-five years old when he left Haran. Therefore according to Genesis he must have started for Canaan before the death of his father, and not afterwards, as Acts would have it. vs. 6. *Four hundred years* — This agrees with Genesis xv. 13, but not with the reckoning in Ex. xii. 40 (cf. Gal. iii. 17). Both numbers are given in Josephus also. vs. 10. *Pharaoh* — A dynastic, not an individual, name. vs. 14. *Threescore and fifteen souls* — Here the Septuagint is followed, which gives seventy-five where the Hebrew gives seventy. vs. 16. In Gen. l. 13 it is said that Jacob was buried in the cave of Machpelah, but here Shechem is named as his burial-place. In Gen. xxxiii. 19 we read that Jacob bought ground of the children of Hamor; here Abraham is said to have made the purchase. The disagreements are patent, as even Calvin acknowledged, and disprove beyond all cavil the dogma of Biblical infallibility. vs. 22. From this verse it has been concluded that through Moses the religion and learning of Egypt affected Israelitish thought; but the best authorities now affirm that no such influence of Egyptian thought can be traced. Of course it will be understood that this account of Moses, like the narrative in the Old Testament and the rabbinical traditions from which it is derived, is purely legendary. vs. 23. Following tradition, Stephen divides the life of Moses into three periods, of forty years each (cf. vs. 30, 36). This is mnemonic, but not

authentic. vs. 29. *Midian* — Probably the Sinaitic peninsula. *Two sons* — The names are given (Ex. xviii. 3, 4) as Gershom and Eliezer. vs. 37. See note on iii. 22. vs. 43. The Hebrew text of Amos v. 25-27 seems to be hopelessly corrupt; here the Septuagint is followed, which gives Moloch and Rephan instead of Siccuth and Chiun, as in the Hebrew. Possibly the author means that in the wilderness the Jews worshipped the sun and Saturn. vs. 45. *Joshua* — Notice the change from "Jesus" in the Authorized Version. vs. 53. *Ordained by angels* — "Jewish tradition ascribed to angels an important place as assistants in the giving of the law."

## QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

Mention some of the historical errors in Stephen's speech (cf. vss. 2, 4, 6, 14, 16, etc.). What becomes of the doctrine of the infallibility of the Bible when these errors are acknowledged? Did Stephen have any sources of knowledge about the early history of the Jews besides the Old Testament? How much of this history can be accepted as true? Into what artificial periods is the life of Moses divided? What is the real meaning of the passage from Deuteronomy quoted in vs. 37? What can be said as to the meaning of vs. 43? What was the Tabernacle of Testimony? Why is the law said to have been ordained by angels? Do you think this speech, as here reported, was actually delivered by Stephen?

## COMMENTARY.

In reviewing the course of national history, Stephen seeks illustrations of two chief ideas which form the basis of his defence. The first is that God had revealed himself apart from the Temple, and even in other lands, so that even were the Temple destroyed, his care for the nation would not be less; and second, that with characteristic perversity and blindness the people had in the past rejected their God-sent deliverers precisely as they had put Jesus to death.

I. **The Revelation of God apart from the Temple.** — Four instances are adduced to prove that God's communications were not confined to the holy place or the holy land.

(a) The God of glory appeared to Abraham even before he dwelt in Haran, — much more, therefore, before he had reached Canaan, — and promised him the land of Israel.

(b) God cared for his people while they were in Egypt, before the Temple was built, and while they were outside the limits of Palestine.

(c) After Moses had fled to the wilderness he received there a communication from the Lord. "The place whereon thou standest

is holy ground ;” consequently, holy ground and the revelation of God’s presence were not confined to Mount Moriah, where the Temple was.

(*d*) When the Israelites were in the wilderness they were not even devoted to Jehovah alone ; yet he led them there in spite of their service of the host of heaven. During the wilderness wandering and the conquest of Canaan, when God was most signally with his people, they had no temple, but only a movable “tent of testimony.”

Having shown that the Temple had not been necessary for the protecting presence and the revelation of God, Stephen suddenly shifts to a positive charge, that the Temple of which they made so much was really a mark of the spiritual degeneracy of the people, who had forgotten that “the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands.” It is singular that this speech should have been deemed pointless and rambling ; for its main thought is perfectly distinct, and it is a complete answer to the charge. He had been accused of blasphemy for daring to assert that the Temple could be destroyed. His argument in reply is that the Temple was never necessary historically for communion with God, that in the palmy days when God was most manifestly with his people the Temple was not in existence, and finally that the erection of a temple was disapproved by Him for whom human hands can rear no place of rest. The speech, therefore, is a powerful protest, based on national history, against the particularism of the Jews.

**II. The Habitual Rejection by the People of their God-sent Deliverers.** — Three instances are referred to in national history :

(*a*) Joseph was rejected by the patriarchs, who, moved with jealousy, sold him into Egypt.

(*b*) The Jews in Egypt thrust away Moses, saying, “Who made thee a ruler and a judge?” Yet it was he whom God had raised up to be a deliverer of his people.

(*c*) In the wilderness the people would not be obedient to Moses, but turned toward Aaron instead.

The object of this line of argument is unmistakable. Since the accusers were so zealous for Moses, and charged him with dishonoring the national hero, he would show them that while Moses was alive he was treated with shame and abuse even as the greater prophet whose coming he foresaw had just been rejected by a people whose history revealed a chronic inability to recognize a messenger of God. This line of argument reaches a climax in a burst of indignant eloquence (vss. 51, 52) which brought the speech to an abrupt close.

There is one point in favor of the authenticity of this speech. It is usually argued that the Epistle to the Hebrews must have

been written prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, since had its author known of that event he could hardly have failed to use it as a conclusive argument in support of his main thesis. Similarly it might be urged that had this speech been invented long after the overthrow of the temple it is incredible that an author so careless about anachronisms as Luke has already been proved in the case of Theudas would not have referred, prophetically at least, to the fall of the temple as decisive evidence for his central plea. The historical blunders also go a little way in behalf of the authenticity of the defence in which they occur, for it is more natural that a speaker would be guilty of them in an extemporaneous address before a hostile audience, than that they should be committed in cold blood by an author with the Old Testament at hand. One argument against the speech has been that it presupposes greater freedom, and spirituality in a member of the Jerusalem Church than we have a right to concede in view of Paul's relations to the mother church; in other words, that the speech is too Pauline to come from the lips of the member of a church dominated by Peter. We shall meet other applications of this argument in studying the Acts; and therefore it may be as well to say now that it is pure question-begging. Reasons will appear later on for believing that there was more liberality of sentiment in the Jerusalem Church than this argument presupposes; and there is no *à priori* reason why this may not have been spoken by Stephen. Indeed, while no one would claim that the speech is a verbatim report, it seems only fair to assume, until we have better evidence to the contrary, that this, like the speech of Gamaliel, represents substantially the thought of the man to whom it is ascribed. In that case, Stephen is one of the neglected prophets of the Church, standing to Paul about as John the Baptist stood to Jesus. At any rate, this speech shows us the spirit already stirring in the Church, which in the person of Paul was to make of Christianity a universal religion of spirituality and freedom.

### TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

God's revelations independent of temple or holy ground.

Other rejected leaders in Jewish history.

The doctrine of Biblical infallibility, and the clear historical blunders of this speech.

The authenticity of the speech.



## LESSON X.

### “THE MARTYRS’ NOBLE HOST.”

LESSON PASSAGE, — Acts VII. 54-VIII. 3.

**Explanatory Notes.** — vs. 55. *The Glory of God* — The term is not used abstractly or indefinitely, but denotes some visible and concrete appearance, like the reputed shechinah of the wilderness and the Temple. vs. 56. “*Son of Man*” — The favorite self-designation of Jesus in the Gospels, applied to him by no one else, and found elsewhere only here and in Revelation, where the writer has the Daniel vision in mind. vs. 58. It was customary to put criminals to death outside the city. “The person to be stoned was placed on an elevation twice the height of a man, from whence, with his hands bound, he was thrown down; and then each of the witnesses cast a great stone upon him, thus taking upon themselves the guilt of murder, if they had borne false testimony.” Then if the condemned were still alive, the people gave the finishing stroke. vs. 60. There can be no doubt about the genuineness of Stephen’s prayer, although the similar utterance attributed to Jesus (Luke xxiii. 34) is doubtful. *He fell asleep* — From this beautiful idea comes our English word “cemetery,” — sleeping-place. viii. 1. *Saul* — The first appearance in Christian history of the man who became the great missionary and apostle. Born in Tarsus, he had been educated in the school of Gamaliel, at Jerusalem, and was conspicuous for his thorough-going Phariseeism. It is not likely that he was a member of the Sanhedrin, although as a law student he undoubtedly attended the sessions of the court, and both in the court and at the place of execution took part in the tumultuous proceedings. *Except the apostles* — This is curious; for the apostles, as head and front of the persecuted sect, would naturally bear the brunt of popular fury. It may be, however, that it was only the Hellenists who were driven out, and that the Hebrew Christians, notably the apostles, took pains to show their disapproval of the revolutionary preaching of Stephen. That the fugitives

betook themselves to Samaria seems to prove that they cannot have been of the narrow, exclusive party. vs. 3. Notice that Paul shows the same aggressive energy here which he afterward displayed in the Church.

## QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

What is meant by the "Glory of God"? Why do you suppose Jesus is represented as *standing*, instead of sitting, at the right hand of God? What is noticeable about the use of the phrase, "Son of Man"? Why was Stephen cast out of the city? Describe the manner of execution. Who was Saul? What was Stephen's dying prayer? By what figure is his death described? How did Saul "consent unto his death"? What consequences for the Church followed the execution of Stephen? What do you think about the story of his vision?

## COMMENTARY.

**I. The Death of Stephen.** — A more serious objection to the trustworthiness of this narrative than those considered in the last lesson is based upon the illegal and tumultuous proceedings of execution. At this time the Sanhedrin had no authority to inflict the death penalty, as we learn from the report of the trial of Jesus; and how could the Romans have allowed such an outbreak of mob rule as this appears to have been? But it has been recently pointed out that, according to the usual chronology, the death of Stephen must have occurred after Pilate had been sent to Rome, and while Marcellus was in temporary charge of Judea. But Marcellus was a personal friend of Vitellius, president of Syria, and was under his orders; therefore he may be supposed to have followed the conciliatory policy of his chief, which restored to the Jews many of their ancient privileges. It may be, therefore, that during this lax and quiet interregnum the Sanhedrin had once more the power of the death penalty.

There is a fine dramatic contrast between what was perceived by the senses and by the soul of Stephen. The senses saw infuriated faces and heard the gnashing of teeth; but the soul was open to a heavenly vision. It is the extreme of pettiness to ask how in a roofed room a man could see the heavens opened, as if in the Old Testament story the same eyes that saw the encompassing Syrians saw also the horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. Our author plainly believed that Stephen saw what mortal eyes could

not see ; and it would not be without parallel in the history of martyrs if Stephen himself believed that such a vision was granted him. Of course no explanation will hold of this occurrence, if we grant its authenticity; which would not apply also to the reputed visions of thousands of other men in all centuries. The explanation, that is, must be psychological, and not theological, and can attribute no external reality to what was only a creation of the prophet's imagination.

The prayer of Jesus at his crucifixion, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," which Luke alone records, has been frequently said to have been the inspiration of Stephen's dying words of forgiveness. As it happens, however, the authenticity of the prayer of Jesus is open to serious question. The Vatican manuscript B of the fourth century omits it altogether ; and in the Sinaitic manuscript, also of the fourth century, the words have been bracketed by one corrector, whose marks of deletion have been rubbed out apparently by another hand. Pious sentiment, which would keep the prayer to-day with or against manuscript testimony, must have been equally strong in earlier times ; and therefore it is almost impossible to believe that the passage can have been either wilfully or carelessly omitted ; but it would be perfectly natural that a reader, finding this prayer on the lips of Stephen, and impressed by its sweetness and Christliness, should have attributed it to Jesus also. Stephen, not Jesus, may have been the first to ask forgiveness for his murderers. The Stephen of history may have taught this prayer to the Jesus of tradition. A man who could rise to the mental heights of his defence before the Sanhedrin, and to the moral heights where this prayer comes spontaneously to the lips, ought to have a face like an angel, and before his dying eyes the heavens may well be supposed to have rolled back as a scroll. On the basis of our records, we must judge Stephen one of the noblest heroes of the Christian Church.

II. **Stephen's Successor.** — By one of the strange coincidences of history, the man who was to take up Stephen's work, and put his spiritual thought into definite, victorious form, was present at the scene of his death as an exulting looker-on, and may have been his chief opponent in the synagogue of the Cilicians. Some one has said that Paul was God's answer to Stephen's prayer. To this young man, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, zealous beyond his equals in age for the strictest tradition of the fathers, the thought of Stephen,

which denied the permanent validity of all that the Pharisees held most sacred and certain to secure the salvation of God, must have appeared blasphemous to the last degree. But there was another side to Paul's life at this time, which he has disclosed in that marvellously human and pathetic chapter, the seventh of Romans. Ardent natures demand some high ideal or noble task to enlist their flaming energy; but Phariseeism had nothing of this sort to offer. The zeal which found no door of opportunity became a source of moral peril. Through such a conflict with his eager, tempestuous self Paul was passing; and abhor as he might Stephen's thought, he could not help seeing that here was a young man who had found an elevation and peace of character which he was seeking in vain. To see Stephen and hear his dying prayer must have been for Paul the first step from Judaism to Christianity; but his mind was still unconvinced, and therefore he found in persecuting the blasphemous sect an outlet for his surging energy.

III. **The Scattered Seed.** — It cannot be affirmed, though it is probable, that it was only the Hellenistic members of the Church who were persecuted, while their fellow Christians of the stricter sort took sides with the Pharisees and the populace against them; but there is good reason to believe that the death of Stephen brought to view the latent antagonism between the two schools of thought in the Church. It certainly marks an epoch in history. For the apostles, who had been commanded, according to the tradition, to tarry in Jerusalem till the coming of the spirit, were still in the city; and although the spirit had come, they showed no signs of "preaching the gospel to every creature." The Jerusalem disciples became missionaries, not to save the souls of others, but to preserve their own lives. Persecuted in Jerusalem, they fled to other cities, preaching the word. Without knowing it, Saul, the persecutor, was doing the Church indefinitely more good than harm by freeing it from local trammels, and spreading through Judea and Samaria the teachings of Jesus as interpreted by the more spiritual and sympathetic element in the Christian community.

### TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

The thought and the prayer of Stephen.

What had contemporary Judaism to offer a young, ardent man like Paul?

"The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church."

## LESSON XI.

### PHILIP, THE EVANGELIST.

LESSON PASSAGE, — Acts VIII. 4-40.

**Explanatory Notes.** — vs. 5. *Philip* — A Hellenistic Christian, one of the Seven. *The city of Samaria* — Both the capital city and the district were named Samaria, although the city, which is here intended, was called also Sebaste. vs. 9. *Simon* — In the second century of our era there flourished, principally in Samaria, a religious sect called Simonians, from Simon, their reputed founder, who was regarded as the God-incarnate Messiah. This sect bore such close resemblances to Christianity, especially to Gnostic Christianity, that it was especially dreaded by the Christians; and Simon was held in abhorrence. vs. 19. From this incident the word “simony” has come into use, meaning “the act or practice of trafficking in sacred things, — particularly the buying or selling of ecclesiastical preferment.” vs. 26. *Gaza* — A stronghold on the southern border of Philistia, about three miles from the sea and between fifty and sixty miles from Jerusalem, guarding the road to Egypt. *Desert* — This does not refer to the city, but denotes the less frequented route. vs. 27. *Ethiopia* — Probably Meroë is meant, the rich plain lying between the Nile and the Atbara. *Can'dace* — A dynastic name, like Pharaoh. vs. 33. Observe that Acts, closely following the Septuagint, mistakes the meaning of the Hebrew, which is, “Who among the contemporaries of the captive Israelites paid any attention to the fact that they were slain, and slain for the sins of their brethren?” (Toy. Cf. Is. liii. 7, 8, R. V.) vs. 37. Notice that in the Revised Version this verse drops out. It is said to be a Western liturgical interpolation. vs. 40. *Azotus* — A town of Philistia on the road between Syria and Egypt, about twenty miles north of Gaza. *Cæsarea* — A sea-port about sixty miles farther north on the same road, and nearly the same distance from Jerusalem.

## QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

Who was Philip? What is the city of Samaria? How did Philip gain a hearing? (vss. 6, 7.) Who was Simon? What are the people said to have called him? How had he won pre-eminence? Who came from Jerusalem to Samaria? Why were they sent? What proposition did Simon make? What was Peter's answer? How was Philip called away from Samaria? Where was Gaza? Where did Ethiopia lie? What is the name "Candace"? Tell the story of the conversation with Philip. What has become of verse 37? Do you remember how it reads in the Old Version? Why have the revisers omitted it? What became of Philip? Where were Azotus and Cæsarea?

## COMMENTARY.

I. **The Gospel in Samaria.** — How much of this narrative can be accepted is very doubtful. Three reasons may be mentioned which are strongly against its authenticity: (*a*) The introduction of Simon Magus. Into the tangle of theories about this "devil-sent father of heresies" we need not enter. He has played a very important rôle in the controversies regarding the historical value of the Acts and the relation of Paul to Peter. Certain critics have argued that the person detested by the Jewish Christians under the name of Simon was really Paul; and consequently that this narrative in Acts, written by a harmonizer, is only an attempt to relieve Paul from the odium cast upon him by transferring it to a real Simon, — who was, however, only a creation of the author's imagination, — with whom Peter contended, and whom he overcame. Harnack concludes, however, "that in the fourth decade of the first century a pseudo-Messiah named Simon appeared in Samaria; that he gained a considerable following; that he tried to effect a union with the Christian missionaries, who, however, soon perceived his real character, and shook him off. These facts must be treated as historical. They are vouched for by Justin, whose statement is not borrowed from the Acts." (*Ency. Brit. s. v. Simon Magus.*) That he really held the opinions attributed to him in the second and third centuries is far from likely. This may be only "a fragment" — as it has been called — "of the Simon myth," which represents the enmity between the Christians and the Simonians as existing between the two leaders, Simon and Peter. There is no satisfactory evidence that the two ever met in reality.

The condemnation of Simon by Peter represents the judgment pronounced upon the Simonians by the Church. The marginal reading in verse 23 is very noteworthy; and if it is accepted as the true translation, we should have unmistakable evidence that the "representative character" of the scene is correct. It would be a clear case of a "prophecy after the event." There is so much doubt, however, about the history of Simon that this alone would not be evidence sufficient to reject the narrative; but there are corroborating facts.

(*b*) The mission of Peter and John. We read that the apostles came down to Samaria to confer upon the converts the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is something unheard of before in the Acts, and belonging unquestionably to a comparatively late period in the early history of the Church. The Spirit comes directly from God upon all who believe. While the laying on of hands is practised, it is never thought of as conferring the Spirit. The idea that the Spirit can be imparted, and by means of this act performed by an apostle, is of late origin, and certainly cannot have been held so early as this. It is a part of the later sacerdotal and sacramental system. Thus the narrative is proved to be of late date, and to be guilty of reading back into a primitive time the ideas of a later period. If it has done this in the case of the communication of the spirit, it has probably done so in the case of Simon Magus.

(*c*) The style of the narrative. One can never wholly eradicate the "personal equation" in considering matters of style; and yet repeated reading of this passage (viii. 4-40) has deepened the conviction that it cannot be from the same author as the rest of the book. A single instance of the rough, incoherent, ungrammatical character of the style must suffice. In verse 7 the marginal reading shows the clumsiness which is cleverly covered up by the translation in the text: "For many of those which had unclean spirits that cried came forth." In the Greek it is not the unclean spirits but the "many" that came forth. Such awkwardness as this (cf. also vss. 27, 28 in the original) is not what we learn to expect from the author of this book. Therefore it is probable that we have in this section an interpolation of later date than the rest of the book,—unless this was taken by "Luke" without revision from some current document or tradition,—which from the ease

with which it carries back into earlier days ideas and beliefs that did not prevail till a much later period is shown to be untrustworthy. It is not to be denied, perhaps, that Philip did preach the gospel successfully to the Samaritans; but the details are plainly unauthentic.

II. **Philip and the Ethiopian.**—But bold as Philip had been in preaching the gospel to the Samaritans, he is represented next as doing something even more daring,—so revolutionary, in fact, that at each step in the process he must be guided directly by an angel of the Lord. It is a supernatural intimation that calls him away from Samaria to the desert road leading from Jerusalem to Gaza. On that road he falls in with a native Ethiopian, a proselyte of the Gate, who is on his way from Jerusalem to Gaza, intending there to strike the main road leading to Egypt. Farther from the fold of Israel than even the Samaritans, precluded by his physical condition from entering the congregation, he would doubtless have seemed to a strict Jewish Christian as by no means a proper subject for conversion. And it is again only by a spiritual voice that Philip is led to enter into conversation with him; and after the baptism of the new convert it is once more the spirit that catches away Philip, who has now done the work for which he was sent, and miraculously transports him to Azotus. There is too much of the supernatural in the narrative to give it an air of credibility. The utmost we can say is that Philip, after preaching to the Samaritans, preached also in the coast cities from Azotus to Cæsarea.

Concerning the very interesting textual variation in verse 37, we need say only that the verse is undoubtedly spurious, and that having been first formulated as a marginal addition by "those who, when the Church had become more extended and formal professions of faith were the rule before baptism, felt that there was a want of completeness in the narrative unless some such confession were supposed to have been made" (Lumby), it was afterwards incorporated from the margin into the text.

## TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

- Traditions concerning Simon Magus.
- The supernaturalism in vss. 17, 26-40.
- Liturgical additions to the New Testament text.



## LESSON XII.

### THE CONVERSION OF PAUL.

LESSON PASSAGE, — Acts IX. 1-19.

**Explanatory Notes.** — vs. 1. “Threatening and slaughter was, as it were, the atmosphere in which Saul was living” (Lumby). vs. 2. *Damascus* — A city of Syria, about one hundred and forty miles from Jerusalem, situated in a fertile plateau on the eastern slope of the Anti-Libanus, and intersected by the river Abana. It contained a large Jewish population. *The Way* — Used in the Acts to denote the sect of Christians. Compare the origin and etymology of the name “Methodist.” vs. 5, 6. Observe the omission in Revised Version. vs. 10. In xxii. 12 Ananias is described as “a devout man according to the law, well reported of by all the Jews” (and not merely the Christians). Tradition has it that he afterward became bishop of Damascus, and suffered martyrdom. vs. 11. *Straight street* — Probably the principal street, running straight through the city, east and west. *Judas* — A Jew of Damascus, known only by this reference. *Tarsus* — A city of Cilicia, on the Cydnus River, important as a commercial and intellectual centre, the birthplace of Saul. vs. 13, 14. Three days had elapsed since Paul reached the city, and probably some of his company had made known the purpose of his coming. *Thy saints* — Almost a conventional designation of the Christians. *The chief priests* — It may be that the entire Sanhedrin is meant, although only its principal members are mentioned. The “chief priests” are properly those belonging to the families out of which the high priest was chosen. vs. 15. It is more than likely that this represents only the idea of Paul’s mission held by one who believed in the ministry to the Gentiles, but wished to show that he had equal rights with Peter in regard to the Jews also. vs. 17. Notice the brotherly address, and also that here the Holy Spirit is conferred by the laying on of hands, although Ananias was not an apostle. vs. 18. According to xxii. 16, the baptism was urged by Ananias.

## QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

What have we previously learned of Saul? Why was he, in particular, so hot against the Christians? What authority had the high priest over synagogues in Damascus? Where was Damascus? What is meant by "the Way"? Tell the story of Saul's conversion. What is omitted in vs. 5 and 6 of the Revised Version? What are the three visions related in this lesson? How had Ananias heard about Saul? How is the term "the saints" used? Who were the chief priests? What can be said about vs. 15? What is remarkable in the account of the bestowal upon Paul of the Holy Spirit? Does this account of Saul's conversion impress you as trustworthy?

## COMMENTARY.

Paul is so important a figure in Christianity, second only to Jesus himself, that all the decisive events in his life are deeply significant. Moreover, without understanding the way in which he changed from a persecuting Pharisee into a disciple of Jesus, we cannot comprehend his subsequent thought. In the psychology of his conversion we shall find the secret of his contribution to Christian thought, because in it his constructive ideas are revealed. Our lesson to-day gives an account of the wonderful transformation. Is it trustworthy?

**The Credibility of the Narrative.** — Many circumstances combine to cast suspicion upon the perfect authenticity of the narrative.

(a) Intrinsic improbabilities. 1. In any historical narrative, miracles like these, of blindness and restoration of sight and supernatural visions, — there are three of them here, — arouse instant suspicion. 2. The intimations as to Saul's future career and the impartation of the Spirit by Ananias seem to be the result of later reflection and experience read back into an earlier and simpler time.

(b) The disagreement of this narrative with other accounts in Acts of the same event. In xxvi. 14, Jesus, speaking to Saul in the Aramaic tongue, makes use of a Greek proverb, which the other accounts omit. In ix. 7 the companions of Paul stand speechless; in xxvi. 14 all fall to the earth. In ix. 7 Paul's associates hear the voice, but see no man; in xxii. 9 they behold the light, but hear not the voice. In xxvi. 16 *et seq.* words are ascribed to Jesus which in ix. 15 *et seq.*, with differences, are spoken by Jesus to Ananias, and in xxii. 15 are assigned, again with differences, to Ananias. It is evident, therefore, that this narrative cannot be accepted as entirely authentic. We shall find presently that it undoubtedly preserves a substantially accurate tradition; but we must learn the facts from Paul's Epistles, and not from the Acts.

What, then, does Paul in his undoubtedly genuine Epistles say about his conversion? In Gal. i. 11 *et seq.* he expressly declares his independence of the Twelve, and indeed of any Christian, on the ground that his gospel came to him directly "through the revelation of Jesus Christ." In 1 Corinthians he affirms independence and his true apostleship, since he himself had seen the Lord; and from xv. 8 it is manifest that he refers to Jesus after his resurrection, of whom a special and final vision had been vouchsafed to him. Paul became a Christian, therefore, because by some sort of personal experience, which in Galatians is located near Damascus, he had become convinced that Jesus had been raised from the dead, and so proved to be the Messiah. For the nature of this experience we must study (a) Paul's personality, (b) his previous history, (c) his subsequent teaching.

(a) The personality of Paul. He was not a logical reasoner, but a fervid, impetuous man, acting more often by impulse than on settled convictions. His approach to truth was by flashes of genius rather than by the steady searchings of careful investigation. Therefore he was a man who might fairly be expected to accomplish by a stroke an inward revolution which in a calmer, more thoughtful man would have been the work of years. Furthermore, he was addicted to "visions and revelations." He speaks of them himself, although with diffidence, as if they were a cause for glorifying; and several times in the Acts he is brought to a decision by means of an opportune vision. We may conclude, then, that this revelation of Jesus Christ was one of those frequent experiences concerning the precise nature of which he himself was in doubt (2 Cor. xii. 2), but in which he had full confidence as divinely sent.

(b) The previous history of Paul. We have already seen the effect of Phariseeism upon his ardent spirits and upon his moral character. His own Epistle tells of the spiritual conflict. But he saw that the Christians had that which he lacked; and if Jesus had really been raised from the dead, as the Christians alleged, then the offence of the cross was removed, and he was declared by God to be the Messiah. The cardinal question, then, in Saul's mind must have been, Has God raised Jesus from the dead? He was, as we see in his Epistles, a man of sensitive nature, tender and sympathetic; therefore the punishments he was inflicting upon the Christians must have touched his soul. Is it irrational, then, to suppose that during the long ride from Jerusalem to Damascus the sufferings of the Christians came upon him with horror, and the thought that in the city whither he was going those revolting scenes were to be repeated? Then must he not have asked whether the Christians were not right after all, and Jesus really the Messiah, crucified but risen? From what we know of Saul's temperament it

would be easy to guess that the outcome of this inward strife would be one of those visions which he had, not infrequently. It was quite in harmony with Saul's character, then, to have a vision which made him sure that Jesus was risen from the dead, and so converted him to Christianity. If this was the course of Saul's thought, we should expect to find evidences of it in the didactic portions of his Epistles.

(c) The subsequent teaching of Paul. On reading the Epistles we discover instantly that it is not Jesus the personal teacher, but Jesus the official Christ, in whom Paul believes. The cross and the resurrection are cardinal points in his teaching, — the cross as confuting Judaism and opening a new way of salvation, the resurrection as vindicating the claims of Jesus and proving his divine authority. All his thought starts from the death of Jesus and his glorious resurrection. If, then, the resurrection was so all-important in his later thought, we can understand perfectly well how important it was at the beginning, and how belief in Jesus as the Christ, proved so by the resurrection, was the secret of his conversion. Of course, the convincing vision must be placed as to its objective reality on a level with those of other men who have had similar experiences. Using this fact of Paul's mental life as a starting-point, and making purely objective what he left indefinite, the author of our Book of the Acts has given, or incorporated from his sources, the stories which we have. The stories are unauthentic. The fact of a vision near Damascus which by revealing to him Jesus living and glorified convinced him of the resurrection and Messiahship is established, explain it how we may, by Paul's own testimony. He had a certain experience near Damascus; he believed it a divinely sent vision. We may account for it differently; but it was his own belief concerning it, and not our rational explanation, that governed his thought and conduct.

### TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

The visions attributed to Paul in the Book of the Acts.

The temperament of Paul, logical or emotional.

The "resurrection" in the thought of Paul.

Even if Paul had really seen Jesus as he thought he did, would that fact necessarily have proved the bodily resurrection?

The value of Paul's testimony to the resurrection of Jesus.

# LESSON XIII.

## YEARS OF WAITING.

LESSON PASSAGE, — Acts IX. 19-31.

**Explanatory Notes.** — vs. 20. *The synagogues* — There was no division as yet between Jews and Jewish Christians, even in Damascus. Saul was given letters to the synagogues because the Christians were still in the community of Israel. *The Son of God* — This seems to have been a designation of the Messiah as being pre-eminently the embodiment and representative of the divine nature and will. vs. 22. *The Christ* — An official title, which soon became a proper name, — first Jesus the Christ, then Jesus Christ. vs. 29. *The Grecian Jews* — The Hellenists who had not become Christians, and were bitterly opposed to the Hellenistic Christians, whose thought and conduct seemed to justify the suspicion with which all Hellenists were regarded by the stricter Jews.

### QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

What, according to Acts, did Saul do immediately after his conversion? Why did he speak in the synagogues? What is meant by the Son of God? Describe the manner of Saul's escape. Where did he go? How was he received? Who was Barnabas? With whom did Saul dispute? Must he not have become conspicuous in Jerusalem? Who were the Grecian Jews? Where did Paul go after leaving Jerusalem? How does this passage in Acts compare with Paul's own account in Gal. i. and ii., and also with that in Acts xxii. 17-21?

### COMMENTARY.

I. **The Trustworthiness of the Narrative.** — This lesson brings us to a consideration of one of the most important questions bearing on the authenticity of the Acts. In Galatians Paul himself tells what he did after his conversion; and his account seems to contradict flatly the story in Acts. According to Galatians, immediately after his conversion he went off into Arabia, by which is meant, probably, the region just east of Syria, and not far from Damascus. How long he remained in Arabia we are not told; but it was not till three years after his conversion, during which he had preached long enough in Damascus to incur the enmity of the Jews, that he went up to Jerusalem. In the Acts, however, no mention is made of Arabia, and he is said to have begun to preach

“immediately” in Damascus. The “immediately” in Acts carries him to the synagogues, but in Galatians to the region of Arabia. Again, in the Epistle he takes particular pains to say that on his first visit to Jerusalem he saw none of the apostles save Peter and James, and that after a stay of only fifteen days he departed to Syria and Cilicia, being “unknown by face to the churches in Judea.” Yet in the Acts we find him brought to the apostles by Barnabas, and preaching in Jerusalem with such vigor that the disciples were forced to spirit him away to save his life. It is incredible that one who was so conspicuous should have been unknown in Judea. In Acts xxii. his flight from Jerusalem is due to a warning vision of Jesus in the temple; here it is contrived and carried out by the brethren. Vast ingenuity has been exercised in the attempt to bring these accounts into harmony, but the efforts are unavailing. If we trust Paul in Galatians, we must discredit Luke in the Acts. But is there any reason why Luke should misrepresent the facts? It is often said that the obvious design of our author is to show Paul in closer relations with the apostles than he really was, and consequently he is here described as on friendly terms with the church at Jerusalem and the apostles. But, on the other hand, in Galatians Paul is strenuously insisting that he was absolutely independent of the Twelve, and therefore his interest is to minimize to the lowest degree his relations with the Jerusalem church.

We shrink from charging Paul with dishonesty; but why should we be forward in imputing untruthfulness to the author of the Acts? That Paul preached long and forcibly enough at Damascus to incur hostility and be forced to flee for his life, as the Acts relates, is confirmed by 2 Cor. xi. 32. If in Galatians Paul passes lightly over his associations with the disciples at Damascus, which would have weakened the force of his argument, and is blameless, how can we be severe upon Luke for omitting Arabia? Moreover, if Paul was so zealous a preacher in Damascus that he was obliged to escape by stealth (2 Cor. xi. 33), is it credible that in Jerusalem he would have been silent? The truth is that in Galatians Paul undoubtedly is as thorough an advocate on one side as in the Acts Luke is assumed to have been on the other. We know from Paul’s own testimony elsewhere, and from natural inferences, that in Galatians Paul has slurred over important particulars which would have impaired his case; therefore it is manifestly unfair to take his own story in the Epistles as a virtually infallible standard by conformity to which the Book of the Acts must be judged. Luke, the ostensible historian, is not to be condemned off-hand on the testimony of Paul, the unmistakable

advocate. It is hazardous to venture upon a critical reconstruction of the narrative, but perhaps the course of events was after this fashion : Immediately after his conversion Saul began to preach in the synagogues of Damascus, as would be only natural in view of his rabbinical training. But as the death of Jesus had meant more to him by way of condemnation than it had to the disciples, so now the resurrection had exalted Jesus beyond the estimation of his immediate followers. We do find that in Paul's thought Jesus is less human and more supernatural than he was to those who knew him best. Moreover, the death of Jesus, justifiable from the point of view of Phariseism, had acquired great significance to Paul as the beginning of a new order. Hence even at the beginning of his ministry Paul must have taken advanced ground ; and as the Jews and even the disciples in Jerusalem were opposed to Stephen, so in Damascus there was very likely a strong opposition to Paul from both directions, which made it expedient that he should betake himself for a time to the solitudes of Arabia. But he soon returned to Damascus, and gathered about him a group of followers, who are called "*his* disciples." Again contention arose, and Paul fled from Damascus to Jerusalem. Here he was introduced by Barnabas to Peter and James, who were perhaps the only apostles left in the city, and immediately began to dispute with the Hellenists. As in Damascus, so in Jerusalem he inflamed passion among the Jews, and alarmed his fellow-Christians. Possibly the emotional strain may have brought on one of his frequent visions, in which he was warned to leave the city ; and we may be sure the brethren were only too glad to be rid of the firebrand. And so he went to his old home in Tarsus, apparently going by land through Syria. Though well known in Jerusalem, he may have been totally unknown to the *other* churches in Judea.

II. **Saul in Damascus.** — The *scene* of Saul's preaching was the Jewish synagogues. Wherever the Jews of the Dispersion went, they had their synagogues for reading the Scriptures and discussing their interpretation. In any foreign city the synagogue was the *rendezvous* of the Jews ; and therefore it was to the synagogue that Paul always turned first. Besides Jews and Christian Jews met together there ; and consequently in Damascus, where there was already a considerable Christian element, he was sure to find sympathizers. The *substance* of his preaching was that Jesus is the Son of God. If Paul actually employed that term, it is to his Epistles that we must look for his understanding of it. Undoubtedly Paul did place Jesus upon a loftier eminence than the other disciples, precisely as he had in the days of his Phariseism degraded Jesus below the estimation of his fellow Jews. To him, in the Epistles, at any rate, Jesus was a pre-existent being, higher than ordinary man, and sent by God on a special mission as the Messiah. But his sonship was

not unique or peculiar to himself. The Son of God seems also to have been used of the Messiah as being like the prophets and kings of the Old Testament, who also are called sons of God, though of highest rank and most representative character. The final *result* of his preaching was an outbreak of fanaticism which reached even to the civil ruler, who set guard over the gates to take him. In Corinthians Paul says that the ruler was an ethnarch under Aretas, the Arabian king, thus giving us a valuable chronological datum ; for as Meyer proves (Com. on Acts, Intr. Sect. iv.), it can only have been during the period between the death of Tiberius and the second year of Caligula (A. D 39), when Arabian affairs were adjusted, that Aretas held possession of Damascus. If, then, we date Saul's escape from Damascus at 37-39, we should place his conversion about three years earlier,—that is, about 34-36 A. D., with a strong leaning toward A. D. 35 as the exact date.

**Saul at Jerusalem.**—There is a tradition that Barnabas and Saul were students together in the school of Gamaliel. It was Barnabas who vouched for the convert's integrity, and by securing the endorsement of the apostles removed the entirely natural doubts and apprehensions of the disciples. It may seem remarkable that Saul's contention should have been with the Hellenistic Jews, who were less orthodox than their Hebrew brothers ; but history furnishes many a parallel. Many of the Hellenists were in the position of men who, having gone a little way out of the fold, are afraid of going or seeming to go further. Hence, as is so often the case, some of them sought to balance their liberality on one side by over-strictness on the other. Saul was a Hellenist, but he was also of the strictest sect of the Pharisees. As Jesus said, the coming of new light means deeper gloom for some and a brighter path for others ; so among the Hellenists some grew more intolerant, while others, becoming Christians, led the Church into larger freedom.

**Saul at Tarsus.**—For nearly ten years now Saul drops out of sight. No one knows what he was doing in Tarsus ; but certainly he was thinking, and probably he was preaching on occasion. But those years are a total blank in the life of this energetic, untiring worker. When he steps out of his obscurity at the invitation of Barnabas, it will be to enter upon the work which has made him immortal in the gratitude of the Christian Church.

## TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

The discrepancies between this passage and the first two chapters of Galatians, and their effect upon the authenticity of Acts.

Paul's idea of Jesus as conveyed by the term, "Son of God," and disclosed in the Epistles.

Bigotry in liberality. The different results of opportunity.



## LESSON XIV.

### AN OPENING DOOR.

LESSON PASSAGE, — Acts IX. 32-X. 23.

**Explanatory Notes.** — vs. 32. *Lydda* — A town about eleven miles from Joppa, on the way to Jerusalem. vs. 33. *Aeneas* — Pronounced *Æ'neus*, not the same name as that of the Trojan hero. vs. 35. *Sharon* — A beautiful plain extending along the sea-coast from Cæsarea to Joppa, about thirty miles long. Compare with this account of the conversion of the population as a whole the story of the burning of the city of Lydda by Cestius (Josephus, Wars. ii. 19, 1), in which it is said that “the whole multitude had gone up to Jerusalem,” and immediately afterwards that fifty of those who showed themselves were slain. vs. 36. *Joppa* — The seaport of Jerusalem, reputed to be the spot where Andromeda was exposed. *Tabitha* — The Aramaic equivalent of the Greek “Dorcas,” meaning gazelle. vs. 39. The original seems to imply that the widows had been the recipients of her bounty, and exhibited, either on themselves or as their own, the garments she had made. vs. 40. Cf. the raising of the daughter of Jai'rus, Mark v. 39 *et seq.* vs. 43. *Simon, a tanner* — That Peter, a Jew, went to lodge at the house of a tanner, whose trade was deemed “unclean,” proves that his Jewish scruples were weakening. x. 1. *Cæsarea* — See note on viii. 40. *Cornelius* — Commander of the band of Roman soldiers, not the auxiliaries, stationed at Cæsarea. vs. 2. *Feared God* — This is the technical term used to denote a Gentile who observed certain points of the Jewish law without becoming by circumcision a member of the commonwealth of Israel. Cornelius reminds us of the centurion in Luke vii. 4 *et seq.* Observe the general attitude of our author toward the Romans. vs. 3. *The ninth hour* — About 3 P.M., a regular hour of prayer. vs. 4. Notice the address, “Lord,” to an angel (cf. ix. 5). vs. 9. *Sixth hour* — 12 M. vs. 14. As a strict Jew, Peter had always observed the distinction between clean and unclean meats laid down in the book of the law. The order was equivalent to one requiring a Hindu to violate caste (cf. 2 Macc. vi., vii.).

## QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

Where was Lydda? Tell the story of the healing of Æneas. What was Sharon? Is it mentioned elsewhere in the Bible? What was the result of the miracle? Where did Peter go next? What led him to go? Where is Joppa? Give the story of the restoration of Tabitha. Of what does it remind you? Where did Peter lodge in Joppa? What is said of Cornelius? What is the meaning of "one who feared God"? What was his "memorial before God"? Why did he send for Peter? Describe Peter's vision. What must it have meant to Peter? Did he understand its interpretation? How was it made known to him?

## COMMENTARY.

**Peter at Lydda.** — As Peter and John had gone down to Samaria to complete the work of Philip, so it appears that now Peter alone goes to the coast cities to visit the disciples there. At Lydda he finds a man who had been bedridden for eight years, and instantly heals him in the name of Jesus Christ. This is no novel power of miracle-working. Peter by his presence, and even by his shadow, had done more wonderful things than this; and we must judge this alleged miracle exactly as we have the others. It is impossible now to tell what grain of fact may be in the narrative; but there is certainly no reason why we should accept as true the cure of the palsied man; neither are we called upon to urge rationalistic apologies and explanations. That Æneas had been slowly improving, but did not know how well he was till the word of Peter gave him confidence in himself, is an hypothesis often made, but without a shred of evidence in the narrative to support it. The story of the miracle is as unhistorical as is the companion statement that all who dwelt in Lydda, and even all those in the Sharon plain, seeing the miracle, turned to Jesus as Lord.

**Peter at Joppa.** — It appears that when the rumor of this miracle reached Joppa, it put hope in those who were bewailing the death of one of the most conspicuously helpful members of the Church. A Jewish woman Tabitha, called also by the equivalent Greek name, Dorcas, had just died; but the disciples, after preparing the body for the grave, placed it in the upper room of the house, a quite unusual place, and sent to Peter, begging him not to tarry longer at Lydda, but to come forthwith to Joppa. Arrived at Joppa, and brought into the upper chamber, Peter found many widows, all of whom were displaying, apparently on their own persons, the garments which the dead woman had made for

them, as if seeking by this means to move Peter to compassion and help. Following the example of Jesus at the raising of the daughter of Jairus, Peter cleared the room; and then using, if he spoke Aramaic, almost precisely the words uttered by Jesus in recalling to life the "little lamb" (Mark v. 41), he brings again from the dead this woman, "full of good works and alms-deeds." By this miracle Peter became a notable figure in Joppa; and consequently his choice of residence is the more striking. An orthodox Jew deemed the tanner's trade unclean; hence when Peter went to lodge at Simon's house in Joppa, he gave visible testimony to a partial victory over his Jewish scruples. Undoubtedly the author makes mention of this fact by way of preparation for the more remarkable departure from Jewish exclusiveness which immediately follows. When a man like Peter goes to lodge in a tanner's house, some more daring innovation may be expected shortly.

**The Vision on the Housetop.** — Among the Jews there were rigid distinctions between clean and unclean meats, which were believed to have been ordained by God himself. Their real origin is not yet certain, though they seem to be related to primitive totemism. But they existed, and were imperative. When, therefore, Peter in a dream saw a great vessel containing all manner of beasts, and heard a voice bidding him kill and eat, his natural impulse was to object in the name of God, obedience to whose Levitical law had hitherto kept him from eating anything unclean. And then thrice, for Peter was slow of understanding, and had to have his lessons repeated three times over (cf. John xxi. 15-17), the voice affirmed that God, who was supposed to have made the difference between clean and unclean, had cleansed the unclean, and removed the difference.

So much for the vision; and now we must observe its psychological antecedents and its interpretation. It cannot be that while Peter was in the tanner's house the strangeness of his position did not often come home to him, and questions must have started concerning the ceremonial law. These questionings were the cause of the vision, and its occasion was his hunger; for as the form of the first temptation of Jesus in the wilderness was given by his fasting and the loaf-shaped stones lying around him, so it was desire for food that gave direction to Peter's scruples, following him even into dreamland, based upon Jewish exclusiveness. And the interpretation of the vision was at hand; for even while he was pondering the matter three men appeared, who had left Cæsarea the day before to seek Peter in behalf of Cornelius, the Roman centurion. Both in the Gospel and in the Acts Luke shows a most kindly feeling for Roman officials. It has been said

that in the Roman camps at this period were to be found. "the best types of the old Roman character." But this centurion was one who had been won over in part to Israel, and his prayers and alms were now to receive their answer from God. Philip was in Cæsarea, but it is not to Philip that the angel bids him turn; nor can the angel teach him himself, — he must send to Joppa for Peter. All the machinery of the story points unmistakably to some great forward step soon to be taken, to some important revelation about to be made, not to an obscure and possibly suspected Hellenist like Philip, but to the chief apostle, Peter himself.

And what was this revelation? Being outside of Israel, Cornelius was in Peter's eyes as were the unclean beasts in the great vessel let down from heaven; and removal of all distinctions between clean and unclean animals implied that in the same way the difference between Jew and Gentile had been done away by God. Calvin puts the idea very clearly and accurately: "I think that hereby is shown to Peter that the distinction which God hitherto had made had now been removed. For as He had made a difference between animals, so by the choice of one nation for himself God showed that other nations were common and unclean. Now, the distinction between animals being removed, He consequently shows that there is no longer any difference between men, and that the Jew does not differ from the Greek. Hence Peter is warned not to shrink from contact with the Gentiles as if they were unclean." (Quoted from Stokes' "Acts of the Apostles," vol. ii. p. 128, note.)

One cannot help feeling that a reminiscence of this lesson is preserved in Mark's Gospel — which is traditionally Peter's — where, after recording Jesus' saying about the things that defile a man, the author adds significantly, "This he said, making all meats clean" (vii. 19). May it not be that Peter was musing upon this strange saying of Jesus when he went on the housetop to pray, and that by the vision its full meaning was revealed to him? In the next lesson we shall see how Peter acted upon the vision.

### TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

- Charity in the early Church, as illustrated by the story of Dorcas.
- The attitude of Luke, in the Gospel and the Acts, toward the Romans.
- The psychology of Peter's vision.

## LESSON XV.

### THE LARGER CHRISTIANITY.

LESSON PASSAGE, — Acts X. 23-XI. 18.

**Explanatory Notes.** — vs. 23. Cf. xi. 12, "these six brethren." vs. 28. This is an extreme statement of Jewish exclusiveness. Intercourse between Jews and Gentiles, especially if the Gentile were a "proselyte of the Gate," was not entirely forbidden. vs. 30. Notice in Revised Version the omission of "fasting." vs. 30, 31. Cf. x. 4-6, and observe differences. vs. 34. Cf. Deut. x. 17 and Rom. ii. 11. vs. 36. Cf. Eph. ii. 14, i. 21. vs. 38. Observe the idea of Jesus, — God was *with him*. *Oppressed of the devil* — Not merely demoniacs, but all sick persons were sometimes thought to be possessed. vs. 39. *They slew* — *i. e.*, the Jews, and not the Romans. vs. 41. Cf. Luke xxiv. 43. vs. 42. *Quick* — *i. e.*, living. vs. 43. *Remission of sins* — A distinctly Pauline idea. vs. 46. *Speak with tongues* — Not in foreign languages, but in incoherent utterance; cf. Lesson III. vs. 48. Note the formula of baptism. xi. 12. The brethren who were with him in Cæsarea had accompanied him to Jerusalem. vs. 16. Cf. i. 5 and Luke iii. 16.

#### QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

How far apart were Cæsarea and Joppa? How long did the journey take? Was it unlawful for a Jew to enter the house of a Gentile? What does this report of the speech of Cornelius, compared with the other report in x. 4 and xi. 13, teach concerning Luke's accuracy in quotation? What are the Pauline parallels to Peter's address? What is the idea of Jesus in vs. 38? Whom does Peter make responsible for the death of Jesus? (vs. 39.) What parallel to the Gospel of Luke do we find in vs. 41? Why were Jews amazed that the Holy Spirit had fallen on the Gentiles? What was the sign that the Spirit had come? What is Peter's argument in vs. 47? What was the baptismal formula? (vs. 48.) What complaint was made against Peter on his return to Jerusalem? How does this bear upon the question of primacy? What was the fault in eating with men uncircumcised?

## COMMENTARY.

**I. In the House of Cornelius.** — Upon reaching Cæsarea, Peter, remembering the lesson of his vision on the housetop, went directly to the house of Cornelius, and after hearing about the angel at whose bidding the centurion had sent for him, began to preach to Cornelius and those who were with him. The sermon is thoroughly Pauline in its doctrine, in that it puts Jew and Gentile on a level before God. While Peter was speaking it became evident that the Spirit had fallen upon the Gentiles. Now, the baptism of water was regarded as preliminary to the baptism of the Spirit, or at least as a symbol of it; hence if the larger reality were present, it followed logically that the preliminary symbolic rite should be administered. Hence by Peter's command the Gentiles were baptized, and by that act became members of the Church. Gentiles were admitted to the Church, and hence to participation in the Messiah's kingdom, without first becoming Jews by circumcision. Such an idea as this had not hitherto entered the mind of the Church or of the Jewish people. It seemed to destroy entirely what was believed to be the divinely given prerogative of Israel.

**II. Called to Account in Jerusalem.** — When Peter returned to Jerusalem he found that the rumor of his conduct in Cæsarea had preceded him. If he had been the recognized primate of the Church, contention would not have arisen; but he was immediately taken to task for violating Jewish custom by eating with Gentiles. Peter rehearsed his vision and the story of the proceedings in the house of Cornelius, substantiating his tale by the evidence of those who had accompanied him from Joppa to Cæsarea, and were then with him in Jerusalem. Whereupon the Church accepted the situation, approved his conduct, and rejoiced that the Gentiles as well as they were to have share in the life eternal.

**III. The Authenticity of this Narrative.** — The passages set for our study in the last lesson and in this have been seriously impeached by the critics, and their authenticity has been denied. The reasons are briefly these: (a) *The supernaturalism of the story.* There is one vision to Cornelius in Cæsarea and another to Peter in Joppa, and visions always tend to invalidate the historical

character of a narrative. (b) *Alleged inaccuracies of detail.*

1. Cornelius is called centurion of the Italian band; and it is often argued that while Herod was king there cannot have been a division of the Roman army at Cæsarea. But this is far from certain in view of the attitude of Rome toward Judea, even in Herod's lifetime.

2. It is alleged that the exaggeration of Jewish exclusiveness in verse 28 proves that the author cannot have been familiar with Jewish customs. But stricter usage may have extended the prohibition against eating even to friendly intercourse; and it is not impossible that Peter may have gone beyond the fact on the one side that his conduct might appear in stronger relief.

3. Jesus is said to have preached throughout all Judea, although by the Synoptists his missionary activity is confined almost entirely to Galilee; yet in this particular the Acts would agree with the Fourth Gospel. The phrase, "in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem" is puzzling; but "and" may mean perfectly well "and especially." (c) *The unhistoric character of its representation of Peter and of the Jerusalem church.* This is really the chief ground of opposition to our narrative. It is argued that in view of the hostility of the Jerusalem church and particularly of Peter to Paul, on this very question whether Gentiles could become Christians without receiving circumcision, it is simply impossible that this narrative should be true. The Paulinisms in Peter's sermon are patent, even to the use of words. It must be admitted, therefore, that Peter cannot have used the language here attributed to him. Moreover, in Peter's speech we have the same uncouth, ungrammatical style which aroused our suspicion in the story of Philip's preaching in Samaria and interview with the eunuch.

Yet there are touches which are found elsewhere in Luke: (a) The censuring of Jews rather than Romans for the death of Jesus; (b) The real corporeality of the resurrected Jesus; (c) The idea of "remission of sins." Furthermore, there are signs of early authorship: (a) The representation of Jesus, vs. 38; (b) The direct coming of the Holy Spirit without reference to apostolic or even human agency; (c) The simple baptismal formula, vs. 48. Luke's free handling of his materials warns us not to put much credence upon the circumstances of the narrative. But the real question is, Can it be that Peter, whose opposition to Paul was

afterwards so bitter, admitted in the case of Cornelius the very principle against which he strove with the Apostle to the Gentiles? A few considerations must be briefly touched upon: (a) The "bitter" hostility of Paul and Peter has undoubtedly been grossly exaggerated. (b) There is an immense difference between extending practical welcome to a single convert, or at best to but a few converts, and establishing a theoretical principle which admits all Gentiles on equal terms with Jews. Peter may have done practically what he would never have admitted if presented as only one case of a universal principle. (c) Even Paul himself admits that at one time Peter ate with the Gentiles of Antioch (Gal. ii. 11). According to Paul's own testimony, therefore, we must admit the possibility of Peter's overcoming Jewish scruples in the case of the Gentile Cornelius, and perhaps even going so far as to receive him into the Church.

Our conclusion is, therefore, that while the details of the story are untrustworthy, and while Pauline tendencies are unmistakable, it is by no means certain that Peter did not in the isolated case of Cornelius take a position from which he afterward receded when taught as a universal principle, and when he was more closely under the surveillance of the stricter Jewish Christians; and it may be, although this is much more doubtful, that the Church, although shocked at first, did commend his action in the case of Cornelius.

### TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

The Paulinisms in Peter's sermon.

The arguments for and against the authenticity of the narrative.

The assumption of consistency on the part of Paul and Peter.



# LESSON XVI.

## THE CHRISTIANS.

LESSON PASSAGE, — Acts XI. 19-30.

**Explanatory Notes.** — vs. 19. *Phœnicia* — A tract of country lying between the Lebanon Mountains and the Mediterranean; its principal cities were Tyre and Sidon. *Cyprus* — See note on iv. 36. *Antioch* — A great city of Syria, on the Orontes, sixteen miles from the sea. vs. 20. *Cyrene* — See note on vi. 9. *Greeks* — Not Grecians as in A. V. and R. V. Margin. vs. 25. *Tarsus* — See note on ix. 11. *Christians* — A name given the disciples by the Gentiles, who in this way discriminated them from the Jews. vs. 27. *Prophets* — Preachers who, when moved by the Spirit, spoke in ecstatic but intelligible language and sometimes made use of symbolic acts. Here a prophet foretells the future, but the case is exceptional. vs. 28. *Agabus* — Mentioned only here and in xxi. 10. *Claudius* — Roman Emperor, A.D. 41-54. vs. 30. *Elders* — Or presbyters, called also bishops, a governing body in the local churches, corresponding to our parish committee.

### QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

What was the "tribulation that arose about Stephen"? Where were Phœnicia, Cyprus, and Antioch? To whom did the disciples preach? Who were the Greeks? What is the significance of the change from the Authorized Version? Who was Barnabas? Why was he sent to Antioch? What did he do there? Why did he seek Saul? How many years had Saul been in Tarsus? (cf. Gal. ii. 1; Acts xi. 26, xv. 4.) What name was given to the disciples in Antioch? What is indicated by this new name? Who were prophets? What is known of Agabus? What did he predict? Was his prediction fulfilled? When did Claudius reign? What did the disciples in Antioch do for those in Judea? Who were sent as messengers? Who were the elders?

### COMMENTARY.

I. **A Change of Base.** — At this point the narrative resumes the thread dropped at viii. 4. The intervening chapters have described how the preaching of Philip and Peter opened a door

to the Gentiles, and also the conversion of the man who was destined to be the leader in bringing many through that door into the Church. But even though the Samaritans, the Ethiopian, and Cornelius may have been welcomed by the mother church, traditional prejudices were too strong at Jerusalem to permit the needed enlargement of Christianity. Therefore it is auspicious that in this lesson we find the first step toward establishing a new base of operations. Antioch, not Jerusalem, is soon to become the influential centre of the Church.

The gospel was carried to Antioch by some of those, presumably Hellenists, who had been driven out of Jerusalem by the persecution that raged after the death of Stephen, of which Saul was the instigating spirit. The city was famous for its beauty, art, and commerce, but infamous for its vices. The best and the worst were there. Perhaps there was no city in the East where the teachings of Jesus were more needed, or from which, when purged of Jewish traditionalism, they could be disseminated more widely. When the Christians of the dispersion came to Antioch, they preached not only to the Jews but also to the Greeks, and made converts among the latter class. When the report reached Jerusalem, Barnabas, eminently fitted for such an enterprise, was sent to give words of encouragement or warning as the situation might require. Discerning the greatness of the opportunity, Barnabas bethought him of the scholar of Gamaliel whose passionate energy, both as persecutor and as Christian preacher, he had known in Jerusalem at least ten years before. Evidently he had not been a conspicuous figure since his retirement to Tarsus, for Barnabas has to seek him out; but having found him he brings him to Antioch, and there Paul enters upon his life-work. The man and the opportunity are matched. Henceforth in the book of the Acts Antioch is to be the chief centre of influence, and Saul the chief object of interest. In changing its base of operations the Church has found a new leader. "And the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch." The name cannot have been given by the Jews, since they, not believing that Jesus was the Christ, would never have applied the term to his followers. Nor was it taken by the believers themselves, since it won very slow acceptance among them. It was due, therefore, to the Gentile population of Antioch, who thus acknowledged an apparent difference between this new sect and the rest of the Jews. As the Church comes to have a being and life of its own, it gets a name of its own. It is not the Nazarenes, nor yet a party among the Jews, but the Christians who make the church of Antioch a missionary centre.

**II. Spiritual Sowing and Earthly Reaping.**—The church at Jerusalem had sown spiritual things in Antioch, and it was now to reap material things from the same harvest-field. Warned by a prophet, Agabus, of an impending famine, the church at Antioch raised a relief fund for the mother church at Jerusalem, and forwarded the gift by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. This short paragraph gives us a chronological datum and throws light upon the constitution of the Church.

(a) Prophets and elders. In the Old Testament the prophets are primarily preachers of righteousness as the only way of national safety, and only secondarily are they predictors of coming events. Their gift is that of insight into causes and tendencies, and of foresight only in so far as they discern the future in the present, divining results from their knowledge of ethical principles and their perception of causes already at work. In the New Testament also we find an order of prophets differing only slightly from that in the Old. By the aid of the Spirit, which comes upon them in an exceptional way, without however dethroning the natural powers of intellect, they are enabled to discern truth more clearly than others and to declare it more forcibly. They differ from those who by the same Spirit speak with tongues, in that they are rational and intelligible. In the course of time, however, the inspiration became of a more decidedly mantic character, and the revelations more predictive. The prophets were opposed by the strengthening episcopal order, and virtually died out with the Montanists.

The elders are the governing body of the local church. After the fashion of the synagogue communities each church selected members of a court, or committee, to manage its affairs. This committee, whose members were called indifferently presbyters or bishops, had a chairman or chief member, who afterward developed into the bishop *par excellence*. This is the first time we have had mention of the elders in the Jerusalem Church; when the order was instituted it is impossible to say. Lightfoot supposes that at this time the apostles had gone from the city, and consequently that the powers they had previously exercised over the Church were now in the hands of an elected body of elders. This is plausible, and there are no facts to disprove it. From this on, we shall hear frequently of the elders of the church of Jerusalem, and especially of James the brother of Jesus, who was at their head.

(b) The chronological datum. If we can fix the date of the famine in the reign of Claudius, we shall have a valuable point in the chronology of the Acts. Josephus states that under the procurators Cuspius Fadus and Tiberius Alexander there was a great famine in Judea (Ant. xx. v. 2). The limits of this period, from the beginning of the rule of Fadus to the end of Alexander's term,

are A. D. 44 and 48. The dates of the retirement of Fadus and the accession of Alexander are not known. It has been supposed that this incident is slightly out of chronological order, and that the embassy from Antioch did not reach Jerusalem till after the martyrdom of James, the brother of John. In that case, the "elders" would have been chosen to fill the place of the apostles forced to flee by Herod's persecution. We shall not be very wide of the fact, therefore, if we fix the date of the contribution at 45 A. D.

Unfortunately, however, this gives no help to the chronology of Paul's life, since Luke has undoubtedly erred in representing him as one of the bearers of the donation. In Galatians Paul seeks to prove his independence, and rehearses all his visits to Jerusalem up to the time he was writing in evidence that he cannot have been taught by those that were apostles before him. Obviously, to have omitted one visit would have given his opponents an occasion against him, which they would not have been slow to improve. But he makes no mention whatever of this visit to Jerusalem with Barnabas for the purpose of carrying the benefactions of Antioch. Nor is it a sufficient answer to reply that if he met none of the *apostles* there was no reason why he should speak of the visit, since such an evasion would be dangerous in policy and discreditable. It follows, therefore, that the visit did not occur, and that Luke is guilty of another anachronism. Since he has just spoken of Barnabas and Saul as principal men in the church of Antioch, it seemed proper that through their hands the gift should be sent to Jerusalem. Consequently, important as this date is for the chronology of the Acts, we cannot avail ourselves of it, save indirectly, in the case of Paul.

### TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

The origin of the Christian name.

Jerusalem and Antioch as centres of Christianity.

Paul's "second visit" to Jerusalem.

## LESSON XVII.

### HEROD THE KING.

LESSON PASSAGE, — Acts XII. 1-25.

**Explanatory Notes.** — vs. 1. *Herod* — Agrippa I., grandson of Herod the Great, an ambitious and politic ruler. vs. 2. *James* — One of the original apostles, son of Zebedee. vs. 3. *Days of unleavened bread* — The feast beginning with the passover proper, and continuing a week. vs. 4. *Quaternions* — A band of four soldiers. *Passover* — Here applied to the entire feast, and not merely to the opening rite. vs. 10. *The first and the second ward* — The two soldiers of the quaternion then on guard and not manacled to Peter were stationed as inner and outer sentries. vs. 12. *Mary* — Aunt of Barnabas and mother of John Mark, who accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, and is commonly supposed to be the Mark of our second Gospel. vs. 13. *Rhoda* — *i. e.* Rose. vs. 15. *His angel* — because of the belief that every man has a guardian angel. vs. 17. *James* — The oldest brother of Jesus, who was now chief presbyter of the church in Jerusalem. vs. 20. *Tyre and Sidon* — Coast cities of Phœnicia. Possibly Herod was injuring them either by forbidding trade with Judea or by diverting their commerce elsewhere. vs. 20. *Blastus* — A Roman valet, open to bribery. vs. 21. *A set day* — Appointed as a festival in honor of the safe return of Claudius from Britain to Rome, 44 A. D. vs. 25. Cf. xi. 30.

### QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

Which Herod is referred to in vs. 1? Who was the first apostolic martyr? What were the days of unleavened bread? How was Peter guarded? Tell the story of his escape. What do we know of Mary and John Mark? In vs. 17 which James is meant? What became of Peter? What was the fate of the guards? What account is given

of the death of Herod? What was the occasion of the festival day? What embassy was Herod receiving? Who accompanied Barnabas and Saul back to Antioch?

## COMMENTARY.

I. **Herod, the King.** — This was a son of Aristobulus whom Herod the Great, his father, murdered about 7 B.C. Educated at Rome he led a chequered life till the accession of Caligula, in 37, who gave him part of the dominion of his grandfather. Important additions were made to his realm, till under Claudius he became king over the whole territory of Herod the Great. He was an exceptionally shrewd ruler, — keeping favor with the Jews by an ostentatious regard for their religious scruples, and restraining once and again the Roman emperor from acts which would have set Jewish passions in flame and brought about an insurrection. It is therefore quite in keeping with his character as a conciliator of the people that he is described as putting James to death and arresting Peter when he saw that it pleased the people. James, who was one of the three most intimate friends of Jesus, must have been, next to Peter, the most conspicuous member of the apostolic company; he must be distinguished from James son of Alphæus, also an apostle, from the father of Judas the apostle (cf. Comment. on i. 13), and also from James the brother of Jesus, who afterward became the chief officer in the Jerusalem church. The death of Herod, which occurred shortly after the execution of James, is regarded partly as a retribution for the martyrdom of the apostle and partly as a rebuke to his own overweening pride. The account of Josephus (*Antiq.* xix. viii. 2) agrees remarkably well with this in Acts: the place is the same, Cæsarea; the “set day” is more fully described as a festival “celebrated to make vows for his (Claudius’s) safety” (that is, after his return from Britain); the royal apparel is “a garment made wholly of silver . . . (which) being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun’s rays upon it shone out . . . resplendent;” the cry of the people called forth in Acts by his oration to the ambassadors from Tyre and Sidon is given also by Josephus, but is there said to have been elicited by the splendor of his silver robe; the manner of his death is described in the same way by

both authors. Nothing is said in Josephus of the trouble with Tyre and Sidon, but a possible explanation of it is suggested. With the fancy for building characteristic of the Herod family, Agrippa had erected in Berytus, a seaport town north of Sidon, a theatre and amphitheatre, baths and porticos at enormous expense. It may be that the favor shown to Berytus, which must have been extended also in trade and commerce, has some connection with the enmity toward Tyre and Sidon. In Josephus, moreover, the sign of his death was an owl sitting upon a rope (cf. *Antiq.* xviii. vi. 7) which by Eusebius is altered into an angel, to conform with the narrative in Acts. The date of his death (A.D. 44) is exceedingly important, as it gives us an indubitable point of time in the chronology of the Acts.

II. — **The Escape of Peter.** — As the Greeks would not put Socrates to death till the return of the ship from Delos, so Peter was kept in prison till after the Passover festival. The Church prayed for him as it had prayed for James, but in his case the prayer was answered. Lying between two soldiers and chained to each, he was roused by an angel coming in a flood of light; the chains fell off, the prison gate opened without touch of hand, and dazed with wonder Peter found himself alone in the open street. His coming to the house of Mary, where many were gathered in prayer, is graphically described. The girl who answered his knock recognized the voice, and too overjoyed to think of opening the door ran in to tell the disciples. Although they had been praying for the release of Peter, they could not believe it was really he (some prayers, then, are answered even when those who offer them have no faith), thinking either that Rose was crazy or that it was the guardian angel and not the apostle himself. But they all went to the door where Peter was still knocking, and “when they had opened the door they saw him.” After sending messages to the rest of the disciples, Peter sought a place of concealment. Nobody knew just where he went, and so our author can only speak of it vaguely as “another place.” Peter would not now risk his life as he had on a previous occasion (*Acts v. 17 et seq.*).

It would not be profitable to inquire minutely after the facts which may underlie this quite improbable tradition. If Peter was delivered from prison on the eve of his execution, the angel of the

Lord was some unknown friend of flesh and blood. The scene at the door of Mary's house is told so well and with such an abundance of detail that our inclination is to hold it truth ; but for us no light shines in the cell of Peter, that we may see how his deliverance was brought about.

### **TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.**

The Herods of the New Testament.

The romantic career of Herod Agrippa.

A comparison between the accounts of Herod's death in Luke and in Josephus.

The instances, previously noticed, of angelology in the Acts.



## LESSON XVIII.

### "SAUL, WHO IS ALSO CALLED PAUL."

LESSON PASSAGE, — Acts XIII. 1-12.

**Explanatory Notes.** — vs. 1. *Prophets and teachers* — The teachers seem to have differed from the prophets by being (1) settled in one church, instead of wandering from place to place; and (2) endowed with a continuous, not an intermittent, gift of the Spirit. *Manaen* — Probably his mother was Herod's nurse, although "foster-brother" may mean no more than a near companion in childhood. He must have been an old man; for Herod the Great died B. C. 4, at the age of seventy, and Herod the Tetrarch was his youngest son. vs. 3. *Sent away* — By the church (vs. 3), by the Holy Spirit (vs. 4). vs. 4. *Seleucia* — The seaport of Antioch, reached either by sailing down the Orontes, or by a road running along its bank. vs. 5. *Salamis* — On the east coast of Cyprus. vs. 5. *John* — See note on xii. 12. vs. 6. *Paphos* — On the west coast of Cyprus, a seat of the worship of Aphrodite. *Bar-Jesus* — Son of Jesus. vs. 7. *Proconsul* — An officer appointed by the Roman senate to govern a peaceful province. vs. 10. *Son of the devil* — Not "Son of Jesus" (cf. John viii. 44). vs. 11. *Mist and darkness* — Stages of increasing blindness.

### QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

Who were the prophets of the Church? How did they differ from teachers? What is known of each of the prophets and teachers mentioned in vs. 1? How was the Church "ministering"? Who proposed the first missionary journey? Where were Seleucia, Salamis, and Paphos? Who was John Mark? What was a proconsul? Who opposed the apostles? What punishment came upon him? Of what incident previously studied does this remind us? (Acts viii. 9-24.)

### COMMENTARY.

I. **Divine Authority for the Missionary Journey.** — It should be remembered that invariably, so far, whenever the gospel is to be preached to any except Jews, a special leading of the Spirit has been granted, that the right to extend Christianity might stand unimpeached. This fact shows how anxious our author is to

prove, not only that Peter as well as Paul was an apostle to the Gentiles, but also that such missionary labors had been incited and sanctioned by the Spirit. So here, although Paul and Barnabas were sent forth not from Jerusalem, but from Antioch, Luke takes pains to say that they were called and sent forth by the Holy Spirit, making known his will through men who were accustomed to receive revelations of duty, and who, moreover, were in an attitude of mind, induced by fasting and prayer, most favorable to divine communications. The list of prophets and teachers shows the cosmopolitan character of the church at Antioch: there was Barnabas, of Cyprus, an honored representative of the church of Jerusalem; Symeon, who bore a Roman as well as a Jewish name, showing extra-Jewish associations; Lucius, of Cyrene in Africa; Manaen, an aged man who had lived in the court of the Herods; and Saul, the educated rabbi of Tarsus. Being prophets and teachers, they were accustomed to speak with divine authority; yet the author affirms that the revelation in question came to them in peculiarly favorable conditions. We do not know all that may be included in the idea of "ministering to the Lord." The use of the word is significant. In the Greek Old Testament it is applied to the service of the priests in the temple; in the New Testament (Rom. xv. 27) it is used of a service of charity to those who need relief. Here it clearly refers to a service of prayer and fasting and worship carried on by the prophets, who in the "Teaching of the Twelve Apostles" are called high priests, and the teachers, who are said to have rendered priestly or ritual service. The change in the meaning of the word between the two Testaments marks a momentous change in the notion of worship. While, then, the prophets and teachers were in the best possible condition of mind for receiving intimations of the Spirit, they feel an inward urging, which they take to be a voice of the Spirit, to set apart Barnabas and Saul, not for the work which they propose to do, but for that "whereunto I have called them." With deliberation, fasting, and prayer, the Church, through these its representatives, sends away its missionaries. Evidently, therefore, Paul did not set about his missionary work independently or of his own promptings; he was called by the Spirit, and authorized by the Church. This representation would hardly have been to Paul's liking; for he

always boasted of his entire independence. Mention of the laying on of hands is instructive, since it cannot involve the giving of the Spirit, and must mean only a formal appointment by the representatives of the Church.

II. **In Cyprus.**— Since at the outset Barnabas was leader of the party, it was only natural that Cyprus should be the first point aimed at; for Barnabas had lived in the island, had even been a land-owner there, and hence must have counted on a welcome from the Jews who already knew him. After preaching at Salamis, the apostles traversed the length of the island, nearly a hundred miles, and came to Paphos, the most notorious town on the island. Colonized first from Phœnicia, Cyprus had practised the rites of Astarte; and this cult became the modifying basis of the Greek Aphrodite worship. The temple of the goddess was at Old Paphos, two miles inland; but the principal town, where the Roman governor resided, was on the coast, about ten miles farther north. The Roman provinces were divided into two classes. Those requiring a strong military force were in charge of the Emperor, and were governed by proprætors; those that were practically in a state of peace were handed over to the Senate, and were ruled by proconsuls. At this time Cyprus was a senatorial province; and it is a mark of Luke's accuracy that he calls the Roman official by his proper title. Moreover, an inscription recently found at Soli, in Cyprus, which is said to date from about 55 A. D., actually gives the name of one Paulus as proconsul, who, Lightfoot thinks, is probably to be identified with the Sergius Paulus of Acts, and possibly also with the Sergius Paulus mentioned by Pliny as one of the authorities used in his Natural History. Remembering what Roman satirists tell us of the hold gained by the basest superstitions upon those who had parted from their old beliefs, we are not at a loss to account for the attendance upon the proconsul of a Jewish wizard, bearing the Aramaic name Elymas, which Luke interprets as Magus, or "the sorcerer." The name of the charlatan suggests Simon Magus, whom Peter met in Samaria; and there should be no doubt that the two narratives have some connection with each other. As in the Old Testament Elisha matches the miracles of Elijah, so in the Acts Paul repeats the wonderful works of Peter. Whereupon, awed by the miracle and impressed by the teaching of Paul, the proconsul is said to have become a Christian.

III. "Saul, who is also called Paul." — At verse 9 in this lesson the name of the Apostle to the Gentiles is changed from Saul to Paul. Up to this point he has always been called Saul; henceforth he will be known only as Paul. Many explanations have been offered for this change of name: (a) The one which comes most readily to mind is that the change of name denotes a change of sources. As in Genesis the various documents are distinguished by the use of Yahwe or Elohim as name of God, so it is natural to suppose that Luke passes at this point from a Jerusalem document in which Saul was invariably used to another in which Paul was the constant name. Nevertheless, plausible as this hypothesis may be, it finds no support in the other phenomena of the book or books, and must, apparently, be abandoned. (b) It has been suggested that Saul took the name Paul in honor of the conversion of Sergius Paulus, as Scipio was called Africanus to commemorate his conquest of Africa. But such a flaunting of success is totally unlike Paul, and would greatly lower our respect for him. (c) It is far more likely that Paul had hitherto borne two names. As Symeon was called Niger (xiii. 1), and Joseph, Barnabas (iv. 36), so Saul, the Hebrew name, may have been changed by the Gentiles into Paul, especially since he was little of stature (2 Cor. x. 10). Paulus, meaning little, may have been given as a nickname. If, then, he already bore both names, one Hebrew, the other Gentile, it may reasonably be supposed that as he associated more with Gentiles than with Jews, and his sympathies grew to be stronger with aliens than with those of his own race, the Gentile name became more and more prominent. This is probably the true explanation, — his change of name denotes a change in sympathies.

### TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

"The institution of the four ember seasons as times for solemn ordinations is derived from this incident" (xiii. 2, 3. Stokes, "Acts of the Apostles," vol. ii. p. 194). Is this statement true?

The similarities between viii. 9-24 and xiii. 6-11.

The significance of the change from Saul to Paul. (Cf. 1 Sam. ix. 2, 2 Cor. x. 10.)

## LESSON XIX.

### "THE REGIONS BEYOND."

LESSON PASSAGE, — Acts XIII. 13-52.

**Explanatory Notes.** — vs. 13. *Perga* — City of Pamphylia, a south-central division of Asia Minor, situated a few miles from the mouth of the navigable Cestrus River. vs. 14. *Antioch of Pisidia* — More properly Pisidian Antioch, "a Phrygian city on the side of Pisidia," "the governing and military centre of the southern half of the vast province of Galatia." vs. 15. *Rulers of the synagogue* — "The college of rulers, consisting of 'the ruler' and the elders associated with him," corresponding apparently to the presbyters of the church; according to others, "not officials, but merely persons of rank in the community who exercised by virtue of their social weight a certain influence on the religious practices." vs. 16. The address is to Jews, and proselytes who had not received circumcision but "feared God." vs. 19. *Seven Nations* — Cf. Deut. vii. 1. Observe the change in the Revised Version. vs. 33. Cf. Ps. ii. 7, where the reference is to a king of Judah called from the day of his coronation a begotten son of God. vs. 34. Cf. Is. lv. 3, where the fulfilment of the promise to David (2 Sam. vii. 16) is promised to Israel. Paul takes it to mean the promise quoted from Ps. xvi. 10 (see note on Acts ii. 25) and fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus. vs. 39. Cf. Acts x. 43. vs. 41. Cf. Hab. i. 5. vs. 47. Cf. Is. xlix. 6. In the prophet, Israel is to teach the Gentiles; here, Messiah is to teach the Gentiles truths which Israel rejects. vs. 48. *Ordained* — The Pauline idea of a divine predetermination to salvation. vs. 51. *Iconium* — A city of Lycaonia.

#### QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

Where did the apostles go after leaving Paphos? Who deserted them there? Where was Antioch? Who were the rulers of the synagogue? What two classes does Paul address? Give the substance of his speech. Does not vs. 24 imply that John was already known in Antioch? How does Paul explain the rejection of Jesus by

the rulers in Jerusalem? How was Jesus proved to be the Christ in spite of that rejection? How does Paul use the Old Testament? What was the effect of Paul's sermon? Did any believe his message? (vs. 43, note "continue.") Why did the Jews oppose Paul? What did Paul and Barnabas do? Why did they leave Antioch? Where did they go?

### COMMENTARY.

I. **From Paphos to Antioch.**—When their stay was over at Paphos, the apostles might either make their way back to the east shore of the island and there take ship for Antioch, or else embark on a vessel touching at Paphos bound for Southern Asia Minor, with the expectation of finding, at some Asian port, a ship bound for Syria. They would be very unlikely to meet at Paphos a vessel going direct to Antioch. The latter course was determined upon, and consequently we find the party in Perga of Pamphylia. Here, however, Paul proposed a trip into the interior, which John Mark was unwilling to take, and therefore went home to Jerusalem.

His desertion looks as if the apostles had no idea in coming to Perga except to find a vessel homeward bound. It may be that John Mark, having his home in Jerusalem, was stricter than his companions, and objected to Paul's attitude toward the Gentiles, or that he was a trifle jealous at Paul's assumption of leadership over his kinsman Barnabas. Dr. Ramsay supposes that at Perga Paul had a severe attack of malarial fever which obliged him to seek the highlands of the interior; but this notion depends upon a doubtful identification of the churches founded on this missionary tour with those to which the Epistle to the Galatians is addressed.

Moreover, the journey inland would have been exceedingly trying to an invalid: "At the ordinary rate of twenty miles per day it would require eight days," and the road was beset with "perils by rivers and perils by robbers," besides being rough and mountainous. Pisidian Antioch, like the one in Syria, was founded by Seleucus Nicator and named in honor of his father, Antiochus. It was a Roman colony, and by far the most important city in the region. There were Jews among its inhabitants, brought thither probably by opportunities for trade, who had already won proselytes.

We can easily imagine the excitement in the Jewish community

when it was learned that two visitors from Jerusalem were in town, — one of them, at least, an educated rabbi, — charged with a startling message about the coming of the Messiah. It must have been a thrilling moment in the little synagogue when, on the Sabbath, after the customary reading from the law and the prophets, Paul arose and with a commanding gesture began to speak. But how much more startling was the burden of his address!

II. **The Gospel of the Messiah.** — Paving the way to his main announcement by instances of God's guidance and deliverance of Israel in the past, Paul at last declares that the Messiah promised by the prophets and spoken of by John had actually come in the person of Jesus. Has he then been believed in at Jerusalem? Paul's hearers would certainly ask; and he had to reply, that so far from being accepted he had actually been put to death by the rulers of the people. This would be a decisive objection were it not that God had raised him from the dead, as indeed had been predicted in Prophets and Psalms. Let the Jews of the Dispersion beware, therefore, lest by rejecting this Christ they bring incredible woe upon themselves. A strange message truly! Could it be that the wise men in Jerusalem had been so blinded that they had failed to recognize the Messiah? Who were these two unknown strangers who dared to tax their betters in the holy city with ignorance of the Scriptures?

Moreover, race pride was aroused. Paul had used one or two strange expressions about the inadequacy of the law of Moses and remission of sins to all who believed; and his behavior during the week, as he talked with Gentiles no less freely than with Jews, confirmed the suspicion engendered by these unusual utterances. So on the next Sabbath, when nearly the whole city came together, the Jews were filled with jealous anger, and began to contradict the things spoken by Paul. Whereupon he declared point-blank that he would turn from Jews to Gentiles, as more worthy of eternal life.

In this speech two points deserve especial mention. (*a*) In verse 19, the chronology is very troublesome. According to the text adopted by the Revised Version and all critical editors, four hundred and fifty years elapsed between the complete subjugation of Canaan and the time of the judges. Of course this is absurd,

and various ingenious attempts have been made to elucidate the passage. It is said that the period meant is that of the judges, and that our author follows the chronology of Josephus in preference to that of the Old Testament. Or, it has been proposed to begin the reckoning from the final victory over the Jebusites by David and carry it down to the Babylonian captivity; but the "after these things" (vs. 20) forbids both interpretations. Nothing remains but to acknowledge that with the best attested reading the passage is absolutely incomprehensible.

(*b*) In verse 48 the phrase "as many as were ordained to eternal life" strikes us as narrow and exclusive, but it had exactly the opposite implication when first written or spoken. To the Jew it seemed past belief that God had made choice of any outside of Israel. But Paul teaches that God's chosen people were not confined to a single race, but included believing souls of all lands. In the wonder and delight that any Gentiles were ordained to eternal life no one thought to inquire why all had not been equally appointed. For Paul and his contemporaries, the doctrine of predestination so conceived was an enlargement, not a contraction, of their thought of God.

III. **Flight to Iconium.**— Among the proselytes to Judaism were women of high standing, whom the Jews instigated to procure the expulsion of Paul. "A point which illustrates and is illustrated by the state of society in Asia Minor, is the influence exerted on the apostles' fortunes in Antioch by the women. The honors and influence which belonged to women in the cities of Asia Minor form one of the most remarkable features in the history of the country. . . . Under the Roman Empire we find women magistrates, presidents at games, and loaded with honors" (Ramsay, *Church in the Roman Empire*, pp. 67-68). The magistrates were also aroused against the apostles as disturbers of the peace. Persecuted in Antioch, they fled to Iconium, twenty-seven hours distant, — in Xenophon's time a city of Phrygia, but then belonging to Lycaonia.

### TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

- Possible reasons for the defection of John Mark.
- The doctrine of predestination from Paul's point of view.
- The position of woman in Asia Minor.



## LESSON XX.

### “ONCE WAS I STONED.”

LESSON PASSAGE,— Acts XIV. 1-28.

**Explanatory Notes.**— vs. 4. *Apostles*— Barnabas is called an apostle, showing that the word is not restricted to the Twelve. vs. 6. *Cities of Lycaonia*— Iconium was properly in Lycaonia; but its inhabitants seem to have resented the transfer of their city for administrative purposes from Phrygia to Lycaonia, and refused to speak of it as Lycaonian. *Lystra*— A garrison town, about twenty-five miles from Iconium. *Derbe*— The frontier city of the Roman province on the southeast, about forty miles from Lystra. vs. 11. *The speech of Lycaonia*— The nature of the dialect cannot be determined. vs. 12. The Greek names given in the margin, Zeus and Hermes, are to be preferred. vs. 13. *Garlands*— For the adornment of the victims. *Gates*— Of the city, or possibly of the house where the apostles lodged. vs. 14. *Rent their garments*— In token of grief and abhorrence. vs. 15. *These vain things*— Or gods. vs. 22. *In the faith*— That Jesus was the Messiah, and would soon return to establish the kingdom of God, into which all true believers should enter. vs. 23. *Elders*— *i. e.*, presbyters. vs. 25. *Attalia*— A port of Pamphylia, about sixteen miles west of Perga. vs. 27. *A door of faith*— Giving access to faith; *i. e.*, God had made it possible for the Gentiles to believe in Jesus as the Christ. But the phrase may be more decidedly Pauline, meaning that God had opened a door into the kingdom, which door was faith.

### QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

Where was Iconium? Where did the apostles preach? How were their words confirmed? What was the result in the city? Where was Lystra? What miracle did Paul work in Lystra? What opinion did the people form of Paul and Barnabas? What honors did they prepare to pay them? How were they restrained? Who made trouble for Paul in Lystra? What was done to him? What miracle was wrought? Where was Derbe? How were the apostles received there? By what route did they return to Antioch? How did they organize the churches? What report was made to the church in Antioch?

## COMMENTARY.

I. **In Iconium.** — It is odd that our author immediately after describing a formal turning away by the apostles from Jews to Gentiles should have them go first into the Jewish synagogue of Iconium. Yet it is unfair to impeach the narrative on this account, especially since, in his Epistles, Paul never ceased to think of the Jews as a chosen people, to whom the word of salvation must be presented first. By the power of the apostles' preaching and the miracles which they performed new lines of division were drawn in the city: it was no longer Jew against Gentile, but believers, both Jew and Gentile, against unbelievers. The result was a strong movement against the apostles, countenanced even by the rulers; but before it had reached the point of actual violence, Paul and Barnabas fled.

There is extant an apocryphal book known as the Acts of Paul and Thekla, which tells the story of a maiden of Iconium, who, becoming infatuated with Paul, refused to marry her betrothed, and for this offence, as well as for avowing herself a Christian, was compelled to undergo bitter persecutions. In its present shape the story is undoubtedly very late and unauthentic; yet recent investigations warrant the conclusion that incorporated into a more elaborate book are fragments of a narrative, dating from the end of the first century, which evince their historical value by remarkable accuracy in quite insignificant details. The book is interesting to us chiefly for a description it gives of Paul's appearance, which, says Professor Ramsay, seems to embody a very early tradition. "He was a man small in size, with meeting eyebrows, with a rather large nose, bald-headed, bow-legged, strongly built, full of grace, — for at times he looked like a man, and at times he had the face of an angel."

II. **In Lystra.** — For determining the exact site of this town we are indebted to an American, Professor Sterrett, who, in 1885, discovered a marble pedestal on which was an inscription in honor of Augustus, founder of the Roman colony of Lystra. The location was admirably chosen for a garrison town, being on a hill about a hundred and fifty feet high, with precipitous sides. No trace has been found of a temple dedicated to Zeus outside the city walls.

The miracle done by Paul in Lystra corresponds very closely,

even in the words which describe it, with that performed by Peter at the Beautiful Gate of the temple. In both cases the man is said to have been "lame from his mother's womb," the eye of the apostle is *fastened* upon him, and when cured he *leaps up* and *walks*.

Yet it does not certainly follow that the account of the latter miracle was consciously modelled after the former, since, given a nucleus of fact, the same laws of legend-making would be operative in each case, and the author would fall naturally into similarities of expression.

That the populace mistook the apostles for Zeus and Hermes may be accounted for by the legend, best known to us in Ovid's story of Baucis and Philemon, that these two gods had once in human form visited this very region. That Barnabas was taken for Zeus and Paul for Hermes gives indirect testimony to the personalities of the two men, — the one was "large, gracious, and paternal," the other brisk and eloquent. One of the manuscripts, which is believed to have undergone revision at the hands of some one familiar with the archæology of Asia Minor, has an interesting reading in verse 13, according to which it was Zeus Propolis (Zeus before-the-city) — the adjectival phrase giving a title of Zeus, and not the location of his temple — whose priest made ready the sacrifice.

The remonstrance of Paul is strikingly like his argument in the Epistle to the Romans (*e. g.* i. 18–25), and has often been compared with his address on Mars' Hill to illustrate the ease with which he adapted himself to the experience and intelligence of his audience. To obey is better, but harder, than to sacrifice; and the fickle people who had been ready to worship but were not capable of receiving his teaching were easily persuaded to do him violence. When in Corinthians (2 Cor. xi. 25) Paul, enumerating his trials and hardships, says, "Once was I stoned," he must have been thinking of this very experience at Lystra. But his work there had not been in vain; for besides the unknown believers subsequently gathered into the Church, he converted Timothy, who afterward became his travelling companion. It appears that the author regarded his rapid recovery after the stoning as a miracle of restoration to life. We cannot but remark that Paul alone is molested, the implication being that Barnabas escaped by keeping in the background. But on the next day the two journey together to Derbe, where they are said to have made many disciples (Acts xx. 4).

III. **Homeward Bound.** — How does it happen that the apostles dared to retrace their steps through cities where they had met with actual or threatened violence? It would have been almost as easy to keep on their course, and reach Antioch by an overland route. Why, then, did they attempt again the perilous journey? Besides the desire to perfect an organization of the believers in each town, it has been suggested that since their first visit to the cities new magistrates had come into office, and the mob violence to which they had been subjected gave them a strong legal position, particularly as Paul was a Roman citizen.

It is with the organization of these new churches, however, that we are principally concerned. In the church at Jerusalem we have found a real democracy; its officers were chosen by the vote of the congregation, and publicly confirmed by the apostles. In the "Teaching" (xv. 1) the church is directed to appoint for itself bishops (or elders) and deacons; and commenting on the passage, Schaff says, "The congregational officers, and even the bishops and popes, were elected and supported by the people during the first centuries."

It is bewildering, therefore, to find that in the churches of Asia Minor the elders are *appointed* by the apostles, and the idea of selection by the people is distinctly excluded. It may very well be that the apostles were more competent to pick out the proper men for officers of the young churches than the disciples themselves. Many a minister in a missionary parish has wished that the choice of trustees were in his hands instead of being left to the haphazard suffrages of a congregation. Yet this is not an entirely satisfactory answer, and the passage remains one of the unsolved enigmas of the Book of Acts.

On their inland journey they had merely passed through Perga; but now they preach there, and then cross the plain to Attalia, where they speak the word till a vessel leaves for Antioch. And so with the story of their report to the church which had sent them forth ends the account of the first missionary journey.

### TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

A comparison between Acts iii. 1-10 and xiv. 8-11.

Nature, a witness to God.

"Ordination" in the Early Church.

## LESSON XXI.

### THE CONFERENCE IN JERUSALEM.

LESSON PASSAGE, — Acts XV. 1-35.

**Explanatory Notes.** — vs. 2. *Certain other* — Cf. Gal. ii. 1. vs. 3. *Brought on their way* — The word means both to attend or escort (xx. 38) and to provide with the necessaries for a journey (Tit. iii. 13). vs. 7. *Questioning* — *i. e.*, debate. vs. 10. *Tempt* — Put God's patience and kindness to the test by opposing his will. vs. 13. *James* — The brother of Jesus, head presbyter of the church in Jerusalem. vs. 14. *Symeon* — The Jewish name of the apostle in its most ancient form. vs. 16-18. Cf. Amos ix. 11-12. vs. 20. *Pollutions of idols* — *i. e.*, to abstain from eating the parts of the victim not used in heathen sacrifices, which were sold in open market (cf. vs. 29). *Fornication* — There is no reason why the term should be extended to include marriage within prohibited degrees, etc. *Strangled* — Animals killed without thorough blood-letting. *Blood* — Cf. Deut. xii. 23-25. vs. 22. *Judas* — Otherwise unknown. *Silas* — Afterward one of Paul's travelling companions. vs. 23. *Elder brethren* — Note difference from Authorized Version, and the rendering preferred by the American revisers. vs. 25. *Barnabas and Paul* — Notice the order; cf. vss. 12, 22, 35. vs. 34. Observe the omission; the verse was added to account for the presence of Silas in vs. 40.

#### QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

What caused trouble in the church at Antioch? How was it proposed to settle the dispute? By what route did Paul and Barnabas go to Jerusalem? What position was taken by certain converted Pharisees? What did Peter say? To what particular incident does he refer (ch. x.)? What compromise did James propose? Who were sent back to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas? Why were they sent? What was the substance of the letter? How was the missive received in Antioch?

## COMMENTARY.

This passage is so important in its bearing upon the general character of the Acts, that detailed comments must be waived and our whole attention concentrated upon the differences between this account and Paul's own report in Galatians (ii. 1-10) which have often been urged to invalidate the trustworthiness of Acts. That this visit is to be identified with the second mentioned in Galatians seems to be beyond dispute; for although it is the third in Acts we have seen reason to doubt the authenticity of ch. xi. 30, and in any event the second in Acts preceded, while the second in Galatians followed, the first missionary journey. There is such perfect correspondence in purpose and circumstances that the inference seems unavoidable that in Acts xv. 1-35 and Gal. ii. 1-10 we have two distinct reports of the same conference. The disagreements between the accounts must now be considered.

(a) In Acts the church of Antioch is prominent, — Paul and Barnabas are sent to Jerusalem by its appointment to consult with the mother church upon the *status* of the converted Gentiles. In Galatians Paul says that he went up "by revelation," meaning, apparently, though not certainly, that he received one of those supernatural intimations which were not uncommon in his career.

While there is a real difference here, it is of the slightest importance. For often in Acts the action of the Church is regarded as a revelation of the will of the Spirit, between whose divine, and the Church's human, the mystic line could not be drawn (cf. *e. g.* xiii. 3-4, xv. 28). Moreover, in Galatians, Paul is intent upon establishing his entire independence under the guidance of God; whereas in Acts, the Church is habitually made prominent. It is incredible that Paul and Barnabas, no matter what personal revelation the former may have received, would have left Antioch for Jerusalem on account of a question which had caused so much controversy without the knowledge of the church and a confirmation of their purpose.

(b) In Acts it is said that the entire church of Jerusalem was assembled to consider the matter, whereas in Galatians Paul knows nothing of a general conclave, but speaks only of private interviews between himself and those of repute.

Here again we must recollect that Luke's interest is with the

Church, while Paul is concerned mainly with his relations to those who were "apostles before him." Moreover, in Galatians there is a hint of a general assembly as well as of the private discussions (cf. Gal. ii. 2-3). In Acts, too, the decree was prepared by the "apostles and elder brethren." What can be more natural than that there should have been private interviews between Paul and the chief men of the church? Yet the whole church must have been interested in the question under discussion; and it would be a denial of the democracy which we know actually existed to suppose that the apostles decided the matter without giving all the disciples an opportunity to hear an account of the work among the Gentiles and to express their judgment. Our conclusion is, therefore, that there were both private and public discussions, of which Paul mentions explicitly only the former, and Luke the latter, because of the bias and purpose of each.

(c) It is argued that the attitude of Peter and James as set forth in Acts is totally irreconcilable with their convictions as revealed in Galatians and in early Christian literature.

As regards Peter, the argument will not hold, for Paul himself acknowledges that at Antioch Peter lived not as a Jew, but as a Gentile (Gal. ii. 11-14); and hence we have seen reason to believe that in the case of Cornelius he may have admitted in a particular instance what Paul stood for as a general principle. With James, however, the case is somewhat different. Tradition describes him as "holy from his mother's womb. He drank not wine or strong drink, nor did he eat animal food; a razor came not upon his head; he did not anoint himself with oil. . . . Alone he used to go to the temple; and there he was commonly found upon his knees, praying for forgiveness for the people, so that his knees grew dry and hard like a camel's."

It is difficult to believe that a man of such exceeding righteousness would have taken the ground, by implication, that the Gentiles need not be circumcised to become Christians. Yet even Paul admits that James gave him the right hand of fellowship, and acknowledged his apostleship (Gal. ii. 9). Perhaps if we knew all that happened at Jerusalem, the attitude of James, as described even in Galatians, might seem less surprising. There is a possibility, if nothing more, that Paul circumcised Titus, not by obligation, but as a matter of complaisance, to show that he was not

really opposed to the institutions of the fathers (Acts *xxi. 21-26*). Paul was not a rigid, unbending man ; his quick sympathies kept him flexible ; and while he would have opposed the imposition of circumcision as an obligation, he may have consented to it as a concession. Nevertheless, it must be confessed that James cannot in reality have been so liberal as he is here represented. Indeed, we have had abundant cause to distrust the authenticity of the speeches in Acts ; and we must conclude that here the speech is Luke's alone.

(*d*) Neither in Galatians nor elsewhere does Paul show the faintest knowledge of any decree like that promulgated by the church in Jerusalem. In Galatians the only condition mentioned is that the poor should be remembered. In writing to the Galatians, moreover, it would have been quite in keeping with his argument to refer to a formal decision of the church like this, had it been actually in existence. In Romans, also, he discusses the lawfulness of eating meat offered to idols without even an allusion to this alleged decree in which the church had expressed its opinion on that very point. The only conceivable answer to this objection is that Paul afterward was ashamed of himself for consenting to such requirements, and hence refrained from all mention of the decree ; but this is not quite sufficient. On the whole, it seems best to conclude that this decree is purely imaginary, and that in this particular Luke has gone beyond the facts.

We may conclude, therefore, that while the speech of James and the "decree" are unhistorical, the differences between the account in Acts and that in Galatians have been greatly exaggerated, and are by no means sufficient to impeach seriously the general trustworthiness of Acts. Both accounts are slightly false in coloring or emphasis, not by deliberate intent, but solely because of the disposition and bias of their respective authors. Even Paul, however, admits that the church did not oppose him, but that Peter and James and John gave him the right hand of fellowship ; so that the author of Acts has not erred in representing the Jerusalem church and the Three as at this time friendly to Paul.

### TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

The contrast between the two brothers James and Jesus.

The real meaning of the verses quoted from Amos.

The significance of the four requirements.



## LESSON XXII.

### TO THE ÆGEAN.

LESSON PASSAGE, — Acts XV. 36-XVI. 10.

**Explanatory Notes.** — vs. 7. *Mysia* — The northwestern division of Asia Minor. *Bithynia* — The most western of the provinces bordering the Pontus Euxinus. vs. 8. *Troas* — A seaport town of Mysia. vs. 9. *Macedonia* — At the head of the Ægean, in Greece.

#### QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

Who set out with Paul on his second missionary tour? Why did not Barnabas accompany him? Where did Barnabas go? Do we ever hear of him again? Is there any indication of the side taken by the Antioch church? (vs. 40.) By what route did Paul go to Derbe? Who joined him at Lystra? Where did Paul intend to go next? What prevented him? To what province did he then turn? To what city was he led? What vision came to him there?

#### COMMENTARY.

I. **Strife among Brethren.** — It is a sad episode in the life of Paul that we have now to study. At Antioch, before leaving on his second missionary journey, he quarrelled with his old friend and helper, Barnabas; and the two separated, never to work together again. In the Acts the cause of the strife is said to have been the desire of Barnabas to take with them his cousin, John Mark, to whom Paul objected, on the ground that he had once proved faithless. If this was the real reason, Paul seems to have been in the wrong; for if Mark wished to be given a second trial, it was unkind not to allow him an opportunity to redeem himself. But while Mark may possibly have been the occasion of the separation, he can hardly have been its sole cause. In Galatians, Paul says that when certain from James came down to Antioch and perverted Peter to a Judaistic mode of life, even Barnabas was carried away by their dissimulation. If Peter was

chided by Paul for his recreancy, it cannot be that Barnabas escaped unrebuked. But it must have been very galling to the older apostle to be upbraided by one whom he himself had introduced to the apostles at Jerusalem, and brought into the work at Antioch. Generous as he was, Barnabas must have chafed a little at Paul's growing supremacy; and now to be openly reprimanded must have touched his pride. That the trouble was deeper than mere personal contention appears from the fact that when Paul left Antioch he was "commended by the brethren to the grace of God," while Barnabas sailed to Cyprus with no such benediction. In such a controversy the church would naturally favor the broader view of Paul.

Of the future career of Barnabas we know nothing; it is probable that he went back to his old home in Cyprus, and did no more missionary work. But Paul and his new companion, Silas, were soon away on the second missionary journey.

**II. A New Associate.** — As Silas had taken the place of Barnabas, there was need of a third associate to fill the place of John Mark. At Lystra Paul found Timothy, son of a Christian Jewess and a Greek, whom he took into his company. The statement that Paul circumcised him has caused much discussion, and inferences have been drawn from it hostile to the authenticity of Acts.

Yet enough has previously been said about the character of Paul to show that the apostle may in this instance have done for the sake of expediency what he never could have been compelled to do on the ground of principle. A man may refuse unhesitatingly to administer the sacraments of the Church if they are insisted upon, and yet be quite willing to perform them when left entirely to his own volition out of respect for those to whom they are dear. Paul may have felt that it would needlessly compromise him, and raise a prejudice against his message in the eyes of the Jews of Asia Minor, if Timothy were not circumcised; and since at this time the question had probably never come up in Galatia, his conduct could not be misconstrued.

In view of Paul's temperament and the actual situation at that time in the cities where he was preaching, it is thoroughly unhistorical to declare that this incident cannot have occurred, and therefore that the Book of the Acts must be misleading and untrustworthy.

**III. Guided to the Ægean.** — It is obvious that when Paul left Antioch it was with the purpose first of visiting the churches already established, and then of pushing still farther west into Asia. It is frequently hard, and sometimes impossible, to make out how

geographical terms are used in the Acts, — whether according to popular or Roman usage. The most noticeable and important instance occurs in the passage we are now considering.

Are we to understand by the Asia in which the Spirit forbade the apostles to preach only the three districts of Mysia, Lydia, and Caria, — the coast regions, — or does it include Phrygia also? In Acts ii. 9 Phrygia is mentioned alongside of Asia, and the usage there is plain. It seems natural to suppose that the word is used with the same designation here, since when prevented from preaching in Asia Paul went through Phrygia and Galatia; but using Asia in the largest, Roman sense, as including Phrygia, the author may have meant that the apostles only *went through* Phrygia, and did not stop to preach there on account of the Spirit's prohibition.

An additional complication arises from the revised form of the text in verse 6, which according to some excellent authorities can be translated only Phrygia-Galatia, — in other words, that portion of geographical Phrygia which lay in the Roman province of Galatia. On such a delicate point of exegesis it is impossible to argue in these lessons; and it need be said only that the interpretation referred to seems to be not at all inevitable.

Without going into the intricacies of the argument, we may say that probably the course of the apostles was as follows: After visiting the churches founded on the previous journey, they had planned to follow the great trade road from Antioch toward the Ægean, but were deterred by something which was taken to be an intervention of the Spirit. To have crossed the mountains north of Antioch would have brought them into the part of Phrygia belonging to the Roman province of Asia, where they had been admonished not to preach; therefore they retraced their steps through the region popularly known as Phrygia, and then struck northward through the Roman province of Galatia, passing also through the more restricted territorial Galatia, toward the borders of Bithynia. When they came abreast of the southern boundary of Mysia, they were prevented from pursuing the northward route into Bithynia, and instead, pushing westward along the boundary line of Mysia, came at last to Troas, on the coast of the Ægean.

We shall have to consider in the closing lessons of this course whether our Book of the Acts is composed of two distinct documents, which are to be distinguished, among other marks, by the use in one of popular geographical names, and in the other of provincial terms; but it may be advisable to say here that so far as this passage goes it cannot be quoted fairly on either side of the controversy. In the official language of Rome there was no Phrygia; and no evidence has been adduced that the phrase here used was ever employed to designate that portion of Phrygia

included within the limits of Roman Galatia. If a guess were to be hazarded, it would be that the conditions of the language are most satisfactorily met by regarding Asia and Galatia as denoting the Roman provinces, and Phrygia, the portion of the old district lying outside of Asia.

The question is of importance also in its relation to the destination of the Epistle to the Galatians; for if Galatia here means Roman Galatia, and not merely the little district inhabited by the three tribes whose capitals were at Tavium, Ancyra, and Pessiuus, then the Galatian churches are already known to us, for they were founded at Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch on the first missionary journey. If, however, Galatia is used in the restricted sense, we know nothing whatever about the founding of the churches to which Paul wrote save that they must have been the fruit of his wanderings during this period of indecision.

We meet here another of the visions so abundant in the Acts. It has already been observed that when any important advance is to be made the agent is especially guided by divine intimations, even by open visions.

We are to see in the next lesson the carrying of the gospel into Greece; and these stories of the Spirit blocking the path now in this direction, now in that, and finally bringing the apostles to the chief port of departure for Macedonia, where a vision appears to Paul which is decisive for his conduct, are intended to establish beyond the possibility of a doubt that in crossing the Ægean Paul was fulfilling the imperative will of God. We cannot fail to notice also how close this narrative lies to human experience: a man is eager to be useful in some Asia or Bithynia, which actually needs his service, but a power beyond his control holds him away, till he comes at last to a Troas, where a grander mission than he had dreamed of is disclosed to him.

### TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

- The cause and the occasion of Paul's separation from Barnabas.
- Is it possible to harmonize Acts xvi. 3 with Gal. v. 2?
- The Roman and the popular divisions of Asia Minor.

## LESSON XXIII.

### PAUL AT PHILIPPI.

#### LESSON PASSAGE, — Acts XVI. 11-40.

**Explanatory Notes.** — vs. 11. *Samothrace* — A mountainous island in the Ægean, about thirty-eight miles off the coast of Thrace. *Neapolis* — “A seaport on the Strymonian Gulf, opposite the island of Thasos.” vs. 12. *Philippi* — Named from Philip of Macedon, who enlarged and fortified the more ancient Krenides (“place of fountains”), a Macedonian town on the Egnatian road, about ten miles from Neapolis. *The first* — Either in rank, as enjoying special privileges because a Roman colony, or in geographical position, a frontier city of Macedon, since Neapolis probably belonged to Thrace. *A colony* — A provincial town, usually settled formally by Roman citizens, and modelled as to its municipal organization after Rome itself. vs. 13. *A river side* — The Gangas, not the Strymon. *A place of prayer* — Commonly said to have been either a building open to the sky or an unenclosed place where the Jews regularly met in towns that had no synagogue; but the word may mean simply a synagogue. vs. 14. *A seller of purple* — Either dye or dyed cloths. *Thyatira* — A city of Lydia, in Asia Minor; it contained a guild of dyers. *Worshipped God* — *i. e.*, she was a proselyte. vs. 16. *A spirit of divination* — Revised Version margin reads, “a spirit, a Python.” “Python was the spirit that traditionally guarded Delphi.” The girl was thought to possess oracular power. *Her masters* — *i. e.*, she was held in joint ownership, and prophesied for pay. vs. 19. *The market-place* — The forum, where the courts were held. vs. 20. *Magistrates* — The *duumviri* in the colonial towns often took the military title (R. V. margin, “*prætors*”). vs. 24. *The inner prison* — “A place dark and without ventilation, and hence foul and loathsome.” vs. 35. *The serjeants* — *i. e.*, the lictors (R. V. margin), or rod-bearers.

#### QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

Where were Samothrace, Neapolis, Philippi? What was a Roman colony? What features in the narrative show that Philippi was a colony? (cf. vss. 20, 21, 27, 35.) What is meant by a “place of

prayer"? Who was the first convert to Christianity in Europe? What is a spirit of divination? What caused the first Gentile persecution? What charge was laid against the apostles? What punishments were inflicted? How did Paul and Silas behave in prison? What miracle occurred? Why did the jailer think of suicide? What prevented him? From what did he wish to be saved? (cf. vs. 17.) What is the meaning of Paul's answer? (cf. vs. 34.) How did he treat the apostles? What prompted the message from the magistrates? Why did Paul refuse to go? Why were the magistrates afraid? Where did Paul go after his release?

## COMMENTARY.

**I. The First Convert in Europe.** — In the last verse of the previous lesson there was a significant change from the third to the first person. We must conclude, therefore, that at Troas Paul was joined by another companion, whose record of the journey and of the proceedings at Philippi has been preserved intact. We shall find other instances of this abrupt change as we go on in the book. Whether this unnamed travelling companion was really Luke, the physician, and whether the "we sections" are by the same hand as the rest of the Acts, are questions to be considered later. It is enough now to observe that in this lesson we have what purports to be the story of an eye-witness; and the vividness and general accuracy of the description, even in minute particulars, are such that the implied claim cannot satisfactorily be disputed. Yet even an eye-witness in a superstitious age has limitations of accuracy.

With a south wind it was an easy run from Troas to the island of Samothrace, under the lee of which the vessel lay during the night. A similar run on the next day brought them to Neapolis, whence they journeyed over the mountains, which are exceptionally low at this point, to Philippi. After the defeat of Brutus and Cassius (B. C. 42), Augustus, to commemorate his victory, made the place a Roman colony, transferring to it the inhabitants of some Italian towns which had sided with his opponents. Here on the banks of the Gangas, where a few women had gathered to worship after the manner of the Jews, Paul found his first convert in Europe, Lydia, a proselyte of Asia.

We have already noticed the position of woman in Asia Minor, and the case of Lydia is a capital illustration of the general statement. She was a woman of business, — enterprising, since she had gone from Thyatira to Philippi; probably well-to-do, since as a dealer in purple she would find her customers among people of wealth; of firm convictions, else she would not have attended the unpopular Jewish services, and become known as a proselyte; yet gifted with most tactful, graceful courtesy, as her proffer of hos-

pitality shows, — “If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house.” It is no wonder that with such a woman in it the church at Philippi sent once and again to Paul’s necessities while he was in Thessalonica, and was seen as a “light in the world, holding forth the word of life” (Phil. iv. 16, ii. 15). This story of Paul’s coming to Philippi has a quite modern sound: it was a *man* of Macedonia who “called” him from Troas; it was women to whom he preached after accepting the call.

II. **The First Gentile Persecution.** — The ill-treatment to which Paul had been subjected hitherto had been instigated by embittered Jews; but this was purely Gentile in its origin and character.

(a) The *cause* was interference with a shameless method of gain. In the city was a poor crazy girl, whose ravings were popularly regarded as inspired utterances. She was owned by several masters, — a stock company, as it were, — to whom she brought much gain by her supposed clairvoyant power. Listening to Paul, she had probably caught a few words, which were taken up into her incoherent cries, and following him from place to place, kept repeating them in her madness. A modern evangelist might regard this as a good advertisement, especially as her words were invested with divine authority; but Paul hushed her to silence.

Then her masters seized Paul and Silas, — Timothy and the unnamed companion seem to have escaped, — and brought them before the magistrates, charging them with teaching customs as Jews which it was unlawful for Romans to observe. The accusation is vague, and it cannot now be determined what unlawful customs, if any, were alleged. But the indictment was cleverly drawn, for both people and magistrates were proud of their Roman name and privileges; therefore there was scant mercy for the prisoners.

(b) The *punishment* was scourging and imprisonment. After the lictors had scourged the apostles, they were handed over to the jailer for imprisonment. With their wounds clotted with blood, the apostles were thrust into a loathsome inner prison, and their feet were clamped in the stocks. There they were left to suffer and watch in anguish for the morning. But in the prison of Philippi also there was an “appeal from tyranny to God.” We may not know what hymns Paul and Silas were singing, — “Hark! from the tombs a doleful sound” might seem to us a hymn appropriate to the circumstances, — but at midnight there was a great earthquake, which shook open all the doors, and set every prisoner free.

There may really have been an opportune earthquake; it would be rash to deny it, and the conduct of the magistrates in the morning seems to suggest it; but the jailer clearly believed it to be a miracle. In this light we must interpret his agitated question,

“What must I do to be saved?” These men he knew to be servants of a God not worshipped at Philippi, and hence it was not a great strain upon his credulity to imagine that this “most high God” was about to revenge the cruelties inflicted upon his ambassadors; but they were showing a “way of salvation,” also, and therefore they might teach even him how to be saved from the wrath of a God whom he had unwittingly offended. In his mental condition he was prepared to believe anything and everything that the apostles told him; and it is not marvellous that he was immediately converted and baptized,—he and his house. Then the lacerated backs were tenderly washed, the apostles were brought upstairs into his own rooms, food was set before them, and he rejoiced greatly, having believed *in God*. To believe in Jesus was to believe in the God of Jesus.

(c) *The release.* If an earthquake occurred during the night, the magistrates may have been as badly frightened as the jailer was, and for the same reason. Whether in terror or because they thought the apostles had been sufficiently punished, they sent word early in the morning that the prisoners were to be released. But Paul was not minded to steal away like a discharged culprit. He was a Roman citizen; from verse 37 it would appear that Silas was too; and to scourge a Roman was a grievous fault.

Moreover, the offence had been committed publicly, and without the trial to which every Roman was entitled. It is incomprehensible that Paul should not have pleaded his rights of citizenship earlier; but perhaps his voice was drowned in the uproar, or it may have been deemed a groundless claim. Now, however, Paul was standing on his dignity as a Roman citizen, and in fear that was not superstitious the magistrates themselves came to release him. But Paul had no idea of hastening out of Philippi. One would think that he and Silas needed comforting after their severe experience, but it is they that comfort the brethren; and then they departed.

What must Paul have thought while he sat in the dungeon of the vision he had seen at Troas? Did it look as if Macedonia wanted his help? But the man of Macedonia personified not the wishes but the needs of his country, and the need could not be shown more clearly than by the sufferings which Paul was compelled to undergo.

## TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

The character of the church at Philippi, as revealed in Paul's Epistle to the Philippians.

The value of bad testimony to a good cause.

The meaning of the jailer's question and of Paul's answer.



## LESSON XXIV.

### “ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES.”

LESSON PASSAGE, — Acts XVII. 1-15.

**Explanatory Notes.** — vs. 1. *Amphipolis* — A town in Macedonia on the Egnatian road, about thirty-three miles west of Philippi. *Apollonia* — In Macedonia, about thirty miles west of Amphipolis, on the same great road. *Thessalonica* — The largest and most important commercial city of Macedonia, at the head of the Thermaic Gulf, about thirty-six miles west of Apollonia. vs. 4. *Devout* — A technical term applied to proselytes. vs. 5. *Vile fellows of the rabble* — *i. e.*, market-loungers, street-loafers. *Jason* — It is barely possible that this is the Jason of Rom. xvi. 21, a “kinsman” of Paul. vs. 6. *Rulers* — Politarchs, a very rare word, but used of the magistrates of Thessalonica in a local inscription. vs. 9. *Security* — A guarantee that no treason would be attempted. vs. 10. *Berœa* — a little inland town of Macedonia, off the main road. vs. 11. *The Scriptures* — *i. e.*, of the Old Testament. vs. 14. *As far as to the sea* — Cf. Authorized Version, and note the change.

### QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

Where were Amphipolis, Apollonia, and Thessalonica? What line of argument did Paul use in Thessalonica? What does this prove as to the nature of the objections raised? What was the effect of his preaching? How was a popular clamor raised against him? What charge was made against Jason? What was the result of the trial? Where did Paul go? How did the Berœans receive Paul's preaching? Who stirred up opposition? What was done with Paul? Who remained at Berœa?

### COMMENTARY.

I. **In Thessalonica.** — The journey from Philippi to Thessalonica seems to have been made in three days, with Amphipolis and Apollonia for nightly stopping-places. From the first Epistle to the Thessalonians (the second is probably spurious, and at any

rate is not in evidence) we learn much about the character of the congregation which Paul gathered. The importance of the city as a centre for the propagation of Christianity is witnessed by the completeness and rapidity with which the zeal of the Church became known throughout all Macedonia and Achaia.

That Paul did not tarry in the smaller towns along his route was in pursuance of his fixed policy to preach and establish churches only in large commercial centres whence the word could radiate in all directions. It may be also that there were no synagogues in the cities between Philippi and Thessalonica; and although Paul had been given the ministry to the Gentiles, he always begins his work among his own people. It appears from the Epistle that the church at Thessalonica consisted mainly of Greeks (*e.g.* i. 9-10), who had become imitators of the churches in Judæa, in that they had suffered the same things from their own countrymen that the Jewish Christians had from theirs. The Epistle follows so closely the account in Acts that it has been thought to be based upon it; but it is much more just to infer that the historicity of Acts is corroborated by the Epistle, which is almost certainly Pauline. The narrative in Acts shows that the substance of Paul's preaching was an attempt to prove from the Scriptures that the sufferings and death of Jesus, which the Jews urged as an argument against his Messianic claim, were really a proof of it, since they were in fulfilment of prophecies relating to the Christ.

But this line of reasoning cannot have been very convincing, except to those who already accepted the Hebrew Scriptures as authoritative; and since comparatively few of the Jews believed, it is only natural that this argument should not be referred to in the Epistle. But if Paul taught that Jesus had died, as was predicted of the Christ, he taught also that he had been raised from the dead and was to return in power; and it was this latter teaching which impressed the Gentiles most deeply. Consequently this is prominent in the Epistle (i. 9, 10, iii. 13, iv. 13-v. 6), and with this the Acts agrees (vs. 7). There can be little doubt that at this stage in his ministry Paul laid the principal emphasis upon the actual Messiahship of Jesus and his immediate return in regal power and glory. Obviously such doctrine would bring Paul into conflict with the local authorities, and give occasion for an accusation against him. The Jews opposed him for teaching that *Jesus* was the Messiah, they accused him of proclaiming Jesus as *Messiah*. The latter charge alone would be deemed worthy of consideration by the established government.

The record in Acts is credible as regards the preaching of Paul and the effect of that preaching upon Jews, Gentiles, and local

authorities; and it also agrees well with the authentic references in Thessalonians. It has been objected that to describe the apostles as those who have turned the world upside down proves historical inaccuracy, since at this time the whole inhabited world had not even heard of Jesus, much less had it been seriously disturbed by Christian teachings; but is nothing to be allowed to the exaggerations of angry and vindictive opponents? On the other hand, there is a remarkable evidence of historical exactness in the use of the word for magistrates, — politarchs, “a title strange to classical antiquity, but found upon a triumphal arch which existed till a few years ago across the main street of the modern city of Thessalonica.” As bearing upon the authorship of the Acts we should notice the phrase in verse 2, “as his custom was,” which is identical with that used of Jesus in Luke iv. 16, but is found nowhere else in the New Testament.

While Paul was in Thessalonica he worked at his trade of tent-making, that he might not be dependent for support upon those to whom he preached (1 Thess. ii. 6, 9), and although no one would guess it from the Epistle, he received also contributions from the church in Philippi, nearly a hundred miles away (Phil. iv. 15). From the passage in Philippians one must conclude that Paul stayed in Thessalonica longer than the three weeks mentioned in Acts.

II. **In Berœa.** — Paul and his companions had prudently secreted themselves from the mob of street-loafers who were incited by the Jews to do them harm, and with like caution they left the city stealthily by night. Quitting the main road, to elude pursuit, they went to an insignificant inland town, Berœa, some fifty miles southwest of Thessalonica. It may be conjectured, although the guess is very hazardous, that the Sopater of Berœa (Acts xx. 4), mentioned as a travelling companion during part of Paul’s third missionary journey, is the same man as Sosipater, a “kinsman,” in Rom. xvi. 21. In that case, if kinsman means relative, and not merely congener, Paul’s choice of Berœa would be due in part to the residence there of a member of his own family.

In Berœa, Paul went first to the synagogue, and there preached as in Thessalonica, basing his arguments upon the Scriptures. The methods of his reasoning, if they resembled those employed in the Epistles, may have convinced those unused to logical analysis and devoid of an historical sense, but they would certainly have seemed puerile to us. Yet it was not because of the Scriptures, or conceits of interpretation, that Paul believed in Jesus as the Christ, but because he believed that he himself had seen the risen Jesus. He was seeking to convince others by arguments which had not been the means of convincing him.

The use of the Old Testament in the primitive church has been well described by Thatcher (Apostolic Church, p. 65): "If any passage of the Old Testament could be made to refer to him or to any event in his life, it was triumphantly quoted as a proof of his Messiahship. The method of interpretation then in vogue was the allegorical; and they were guided generally, not by the original meaning of the author, but asked simply if the language could in any way be made to apply to the event in hand." By this method the Church sought to prove to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ predicted in the Old Testament; and subsequently, when the charge of novelty was pressed against Christianity, to show the Gentiles that Christianity was latent in Judaism and hence of great antiquity.

As a result of their study of the Scriptures under the apt and ingenious guidance of Paul, many of the Bereans, even some belonging to the better classes, became Christians. But the Jews at Thessalonica got wind of what was going on at Berea, and came down to enrage the multitudes against Paul and to controvert his teaching. As a result, there ensued a tumult in the city, and Paul was conducted by his friends to a seaport where he might find a ship bound for Athens.

As Paul seems to have left behind at Philippi the unknown companion from whose diary the "we sections" are derived, so for the same purpose of strengthening and guiding the new church he appears to have left Timothy (vs. 10) at Thessalonica. But Timothy soon joined him at Berea, and was left there with Silas while Paul made his way alone to Athens. Arriving there he sent back word by the friends who had escorted him that Timothy and Silas were to join him immediately.

## TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

"We preach Christ crucified, unto Jews a stumbling-block" (1 Cor. i. 23). Why a "stumbling-block"?

The church in Thessalonica as shown in Paul's Epistle.

The value of the Old Testament witness to Jesus as the Christ, as illustrated, for example, in the first two chapters of the Gospel of Matthew.

## LESSON XXV.

### PAUL AT ATHENS.

LESSON PASSAGE, — Acts XVII. 16-34.

**Explanatory Notes.** — vs. 17. *Devout persons* — See note on xvii. 4. vs. 18. *Epicurean* — A school of philosophy founded on the teachings of Epicurus, who ascribed reality only to sensations, and hence made pleasure, even and lasting, the ideal of human existence. *Stoic* — A philosophical school which exalted reason and reflection, and found its ethical ideal in dignified self-control, scorn of circumstances, and virtue for virtue's sake. *Babbler* — A term of contempt, like our "dawcock" or "jackdaw;" it was applied first to birds picking up seeds, then to "loungers in the market-place, who picked up a scanty living by whatever might fall from loads of merchandise," etc., then to parasites, buffoons, and silly chatterers. vs. 19. *Took hold of him* — There is no suggestion of violence (cf. Luke ix. 47). *Arcopagus* — The name of a hill in Athens, and also of the court which held its sittings there and had religious jurisdiction. vs. 22. *Superstitious* — Very religious (Amer. Rev.). vs. 28. *Your own poets* — The quotation is from Aratus (c. 270 B. C.), but there is a similar passage in Cleanthes (c. 300-c. 225 B. C.). vs. 34. *Dionysius, the Arcopagite* — A member of the great council, and hence a man of some distinction. Of him, as of the "*woman named Damaris,*" nothing certain is known.

### QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

What effect did the beautiful statues and buildings of Athens have upon Paul? Where did he speak? Who were Epicureans and Stoics? What did they call Paul? How did they mock him? (vs. 18, *strange gods*; vs. 19, *Arcopagus*.) Where did they give him a hearing? How are the Athenians described? What is the main argument of Paul's speech? Did he insult or compliment the Athenians by his opening words? What inscription did he take for a text? How does he describe the God whom he preached? Was this thought of God entirely novel to the Greeks? From what Greek poet or poets does

Paul quote? What argument is based on the quotation? What change in God's relation to the world was involved in the coming of Jesus? How was Paul's doctrine of the resurrection received?

## COMMENTARY.

**I. Synagogue and Market-Place.**— Suppose that one of us could be miraculously set down in Athens as Paul saw it, with its magnificent temples and statues. Wandering from place to place, every turn would reveal to the admiring visitor new objects of interest and beauty. But Paul belonged to a race that had little appreciation of the beautiful, and his inherited hatred of idolatry was quickened even by the splendid works of art that he saw all about him. The very things in Athens which would entrance us only enraged Paul. He could not be tolerant of idolatry. So the sights which he beheld, whetting his anger and putting an edge on his speech, constrained him to speak in the synagogue, where, it appears, he had previously kept silence, and even in the market-place to such as stopped to listen. It was no new thing for Athens to have a teacher in her market-place, but Paul's message was unlike anything that had ever been heard there before.

We know pretty well what the substance of his preaching must have been, and that he had much to say about Jesus and the resurrection, by which he had been declared the Christ. His nationality was against him, for Jews had little in common with Greeks; and his evident earnestness only made him more ridiculous in the eyes of those who had almost wholly lost intellectual seriousness. So the Athenians simply made fun of him, mocked him by pretending to take him seriously. The epithet applied to him, babblers, is full of derision. When he spoke of Jesus and the resurrection, they said flippantly, "He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange *gods*;" pretending to think the *anastasis*, of which he spoke so frequently, a personal divinity. And to crown all, they carried him to the Areopagus, as if to put him on trial before the most august council of Greece.

**II. On the Areopagus.**— It has been disputed whether Paul appeared before the court known as the Areopagus, or whether he was only taken to the place where the court was wont to assemble. But the entire narrative seems to preclude the view that Paul stood trial before a regularly established court; and the high probability is that he spoke to a promiscuous crowd of loungers, with a sprinkling of philosophers, on the hill where the court ordinarily met. If Paul had been formally accused he would have been brought before the Areopagus; but this Jewish babblers was too

insignificant to receive such notice, and therefore to take him to the Areopagus at all was a make-believe honor. It was as if some half-crazy declaimer about the streets of Washington were to be led into the Supreme Court room and there given a mock trial. There was no violence or open discourtesy, but the whole proceeding was a piece of polite raillery. Nevertheless, what they meant for fun, Paul took in earnest.

Like a clever orator, Paul began by complimenting his hearers. The word which he used has both a good and a bad sense, the border-line between religion and superstition is always hard to run; but it cannot be that Paul deliberately insulted his audience at the outset. Commending their religious zeal, he mentioned an illustration of it which he had already seen, namely, an altar dedicated "To An Unknown God." Whether or not Paul had seen an inscription in precisely those words, and whether, if he had, the Athenians meant by it what Paul assumed they did, are questions that we need not consider. Paul's rabbinical training had made him skilful in manipulating texts; and he interprets the inscription which he quotes to mean that the Athenians, in their exceeding religiousness, after erecting altars to all the gods and goddesses they knew of, had set up another to an unknown God, if perchance there might still be another deity of whom they had not heard.

Now, continued Paul, this unknown God to whom you have erected an altar and whom you are worshipping in ignorance of his name and nature, is the very God whom I declare unto you. Evidently, therefore, the God whom he preached could not be a "strange God," since already in the city there was an altar dedicated to his worship. Having the temples and statues with which the city was crowded present to his mind, if not actually to his eye, Paul spoke of this unknown God as maker and lord, not of a part of Nature, but of the entire universe, and consequently too great to be contained in any temple made with hands. Neither had He need of altar and sacrifices, since those who sacrifice, as well as the animals offered, are His by right of creation. Every nation has its gods; but as all peoples are of one, so this unknown God is He whom all must eventually worship, and after Him all men are really groping. Then, in a quotation from the *Phenomena* of Aratus, Paul announced the universal immanence of the God whom he declared. The verses read:—

"With him, with Zeus, are filled  
All paths we tread and all the marts of men;  
Filled, too, the sea and every creek and bay;  
And all in all things need we help of Zeus,  
For we too are his offspring."

(Quoted from Lindsay, "Acts of the Apostles," vol. ii. p. 85.)

The idea was far from being an uncommon one in Greek literature. In the "Hymn to Zeus," by Cleanthes, occurs the same expression : —

"Thou, O Zeus, art praised above all gods. Many are thy names, and thine is all power forever.

The beginning of the world was from thee ; and with law thou rulest over all things.

Unto thee may all flesh speak, for we are thy offspring."

(Pater's "Plato and Platonism," p. 42.)

If, then, Paul argues, we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that He who has made us can be like the things which we make. Man is greater than any work of his hands, and God must be greater than man, whom He has created. Up to this point, then, the argument of the speech has been : God is too great that your temples should contain him, so self-sufficient that altars and sacrifices are needless, and since we are his offspring, too nobly spiritual to be represented by idols of gold and silver.

So far Paul had provoked no opposition ; but now he turns suddenly from universal religion to proclaim that this unknown God had made a special revelation through Jesus, and that the worship of other gods, which had been overlooked in the past, must now cease, for the day was already fixed on which the whole world should be judged with reference to its belief or disbelief concerning God's prophet, Jesus. That Jesus was a true prophet of God had been proved by his resurrection. With the utterance of that word, which had provoked ridicule before, the spell was broken ; and while some openly mocked and others promised him a subsequent hearing, Paul quietly left the Areopagus. "But certain men clave unto him, and believed."

Both in its thought and in the eloquence and adroitness with which it is presented this speech is in every way worthy and characteristic of Paul. While, therefore, it cannot be claimed that we have here the speech as actually delivered, it may be maintained that a credible tradition lies behind it, and that we have here the substance of what Paul said.

## TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

Athens, as Paul saw it.

The Athenian character, as depicted by Luke.

The argument of Paul's speech.



## LESSON XXVI.

### PAUL AT CORINTH.

LESSON PASSAGE, — Acts XVIII. 1-17.

**Explanatory Notes.** — vs. 1. *Corinth* — The chief commercial city, and at this time the capital, of the Roman province of Achaia. vs. 2. *Aquila* — A Jew of *Pontus*, the northeastern division of Asia Minor, who with *Priscilla* (or “*Prisca*,” Rom. xvi. 3), his wife, had lived in Rome. *Claudius* — The fourth Roman Emperor (41-54 A.D.). vs. 3. *Tentmakers* — Not weavers of tent-cloth from goat’s hair, as is often supposed, but makers of tents out of haircloth, leather, or other material. vs. 5. *Constrained by the word* — The exact meaning is in doubt; either he gave himself wholly up to preaching, or the word which he had to speak became an irresistible force, compelling utterance. vs. 6. *Shook out his raiment* — Cf. xiii. 51 and Matt. x. 14. A symbolic act denoting separation both from personal intercourse and from guilt. vs. 8. *Ruler of the synagogue* — See note on xiii. 15. This was the president of the synagogue, whose especial duty was the care of public worship. vs. 12. *Gallio* — A brother of Seneca, the philosopher. *Proconsul of Achaia* — The Roman province of Achaia covered the whole of Greece proper, including the Peloponnesus. Under Claudius it was a senatorial province, and hence its governor was called a proconsul. vs. 17. *Sosthenes* — “Whether he was a colleague of the above-named Crispus, or successor to him on his resignation in consequence of embracing Christianity, or whether he presided over another synagogue in Corinth, remains undetermined” (Meyer). Probably “the Greeks” of the Authorized Version is a correct gloss, although it does not belong in the text.

#### QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

What city did Paul visit after leaving Athens? Where did Paul lodge in Corinth? What determined his choice of residence? Where did he preach? Who joined him in Corinth? Where had he parted from them? What was the result of their coming upon Paul? What was the burden of his preaching? How was his word received? Where did he preach after the synagogue was closed to him? What encouragements did he have? How long did he remain in Corinth? Who came to Corinth as representative of Rome? What were the duties of the proconsul of Achaia? What charge was laid against Paul before Gallio? How was the charge received? What was the outcome of the trial?

## COMMENTARY.

I. **The Church of Corinth.** — The situation of Corinth gave it exceptional commercial advantages. In the narrows between northern and southern Greece, it controlled the overland trade between the two sections. With its harbors on the Corinthian and the Saronic Gulfs, it was a convenient "carry" for the commerce between Italy and the East. But in its prosperity lay its peril. The moral corruption of the city was enhanced by the shameless practices connected with the worship of Aphrodite. The iniquity of the place is disclosed in Paul's letters, and intimated by the existence of a Greek verb, "corinthiazein," meaning to live in wantonness. But its commanding position as a mercantile centre made it peculiarly attractive to Paul, who must have seen in it a point from which Christianity could be disseminated over the whole world with greatest ease and rapidity. Hence after leaving Athens Paul made his way, whether by land or sea we cannot tell, to Corinth.

From the Epistle to the Corinthians it appears that he arrived there in a mood of great depression. It is not reading too much between the lines to conclude that at Athens he had known something besides "Jesus Christ, and him crucified;" and that in consequence, as he feared, his work had been comparatively fruitless. Moreover, according to the Acts, he had been alone in Athens, and his friends did not arrive from Berea till some time after he reached Corinth.

This raises a question of some importance. From Thessalonians (iii. 1, 2) we learn that Timothy had joined him in Athens, and then had been sent back to carry his messages to the church in Thessalonica. It would seem as if Silas had accompanied Timothy to Athens, and gone with Paul to Corinth. Hence it has been inferred that the author of Acts has blundered, and that Silas and Timothy cannot have joined him at Corinth, but only Timothy. Undoubtedly Acts has omitted to mention Timothy's coming to Athens; but in the passage referred to (1 Thess. iii. 1, 2) "we" may, as often, mean Paul alone, and in 2 Cor. xi. 9 it is written, "The brethren, when they came from Macedonia, supplied my wants." Hence it is probable that Timothy came alone from Berea to Athens, and on his way from Thessalonica to Corinth was joined by Silas. Whether by reason of loneliness or of his ill success at Athens, certainly Paul was not quite himself on his first coming to Corinth. He found lodging with a Jewish family, and frequented the synagogue, where he sought to persuade (R. V. margin) both Jews and Greeks. Not till Timothy had returned, bringing good news from Thessalonica (1 Thess. iii. 6-10), did his

old heart come back to the apostle. Hearing that the Thessalonians were standing fast in the Lord, he gained new life, and was filled with joy and thanksgiving.

At once his preaching in the synagogue took on a more aggressive tone; and his contention that Jesus was the Christ brought down upon him Jewish reviling. Debarred from the synagogue, he found a room in an adjoining house occupied by a Jewish proselyte, and there taught for a year and six months. When trouble with the Jews was at its worst, one of his usual visions came to him, in which the Lord bade him preach fearlessly, since he was not working alone, and there were many in the city who would listen and obey.

But Jewish enmity was not abated; and when the new governor of Achaia arrived Paul was arraigned before him as a false teacher. By all testimonies, Gallio was of exceedingly amiable character, — a Roman gentleman, too large-minded to give himself any concern about a pack of wrangling Jewish enthusiasts. So he instantly dismissed the complaint, and even failed to interfere when the hangers-on about the court, taking their cue from him, and glad of an opportunity to vent their spite upon the Jews, set upon the ruler of the synagogue and beat him before the judgment seat.

When we read that the Lord said to Paul, "I have much people in this city," we turn naturally to the Epistles that we may learn of what sort they were. The picture of the church at Corinth is not one to be admired. Its members were factious and quarrelsome, making little of licentiousness, which filled Paul with horror, and given to drunkenness even at the table of the Lord. Yet they were the Lord's people, "called saints" (1 Cor. i. 2). It is curious that he should speak of the household of Stephanas as the first fruits of Achaia unto Christ (1 Cor. xvi. 15), for in Acts (xvii. 34) there is mention of some who believed in Athens, which was in the Roman province of Achaia. It seems reasonable to infer that his preaching at Athens was even more unsuccessful than is stated in the Acts, and that not one convert resulted from his labors. Because the Christians were so poor, and partly also because they were so ungenerous of mind and suspicious, Paul asked no sustenance from them, but supported himself by working at his trade of tent-making. But when Silas and Timothy arrived they brought him a contribution from Philippi, which enabled him to give less time to tent-making and more to preaching. Good news from Thessalonica and money from Philippi, together with the cheering presence of his friends, gave him the vigor and boldness he had lacked at first.

**II. The Chronology.** — Two notes of time are given in this lesson which may help us fix a point in chronology:—

(a) The Edict of Claudius. Aquila and Priscilla had just arrived from Italy, having been forced to leave Rome by reason of an edict from Claudius expelling all the Jews. Can the date of this edict be ascertained? Claudius reigned from A.D. 41 to 54. At the beginning of his reign he issued an edict "upon the petition of King Agrippa and King Herod," in which he showed remarkable friendliness toward the Jews (Jos. Ant. xix. v. 2, 3). Afterward Dio Cassius records that (as a precautionary measure) he promulgated an ordinance forbidding Jewish assemblies, which must have preceded the edict referred to by Suetonius, which expelled the Jews from Rome because of the "continual tumults instigated by Chrestus." But until the beginning of 53, Herod Agrippa II. was in Rome, on intimate terms with Claudius; and it is unlikely that any order of expulsion would have been put forth while he was at court. We are brought down, therefore, to A.D. 53; and from the fact that the edict cannot have been long in force it is probable that soon after its enactment Claudius died, and the order was ignored by his successor. If, then, the Jews were expelled *c.* 53, it may have been in the summer of 53 that Paul came to Corinth.

(b) The Proconsulship of Gallio. Unfortunately this date cannot be certainly fixed. It is improbable that Gallio would have been honored with the consulship while his brother Seneca was in exile under the emperor's displeasure. Seneca was recalled to Rome in 49. Therefore Gallio cannot have been consul before A.D. 50, or proconsul before 51. Professor Ramsay states positively, but without reference to authorities, that Gallio was "proconsul 1 July, 53-30 June, 54." It is probable, however, that Gallio's honors, and particularly his appointment to the very desirable province of Achaia, were due entirely to his brother's influence, which did not become great till after the accession of Nero in 54. One would think, therefore, that Gallio came to Corinth *c.* 55, after Paul had been there a year and a half, and that immediately on his arrival Paul was brought before him. This date, therefore, agrees very well with that given by the edict of Claudius, and we may say that Paul left Corinth about the year 55 A.D.

### TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

Paul's mood on coming to Corinth (cf. 1 Cor. ii. 1-5; 1 Thes. iii. 1-10; 2 Cor. xi. 9; Phil. iv. 15).

The character of the church in Corinth, as illustrated by Paul's Epistles.

Paul's dependence upon his friends.

## LESSON XXVII.

### AT EPHEBUS.

LESSON PASSAGE,— Acts XVIII. 18-XIX. 22.

**Explanatory Notes.**— vs. 18. *A vow*— Either Aquila or Paul, it is not quite certain to which the participle refers, had made a private vow not to cut his hair for a certain period, which terminated at Cenchreæ. *Cenchreæ*— The port of Corinth, on the Saronic Gulf. vs. 19. *Ephesus*— The capital of the Roman province of Asia. It was the chief seat of the worship of Artemis. vs. 21. Observe the omission in the Revised Version. vs. 23. *Galatia and Phrygia*— The Roman Galatia and the old-time, popular Phrygia. vs. 24. *Apollos*— Nothing is known about him, although some have supposed him to be the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. *Alexandrian*— A native of Alexandria in northern Africa. vs. 25. *The baptism of John*— Pledging the recipient to repentance in preparation for the Messiah soon to appear. xix. 1. *The upper country*— The inland regions of Asia Minor. vs. 9. *The way*— See note on ix. 2. *School of Tyrannus*— The lecture-room of a Greek philosopher. vs. 19. *Books*— Collections of magical formulæ. *Fifty thousand pieces of silver*— Fifty thousand drachmas; but the equivalent purchasing power in terms of our currency cannot be given.

### QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

Where was Cenchreæ? At what port did Paul touch on his way to Syria? What cities did Paul visit in Syria? By what route did he return to Ephesus? Who had preached there during his absence? What had been the substance of the preaching of Apollos? How is he described? Was he at Ephesus when Paul returned? Whose disciples did Paul meet at Ephesus? What was lacking to them? How was the Spirit communicated? What were its manifestations? What is meant by "speaking with tongues" and "prophesying"? Where did Paul begin his preaching in Ephesus? What is "the way"? Why did he leave the synagogue? Where did he preach afterward? What miracles were wrought at Ephesus? Were such marvels unprecedented in Ephesus? What did the Christian believers do with their books of magic and incantations? What were Paul's plans for the future?

## COMMENTARY.

**I. The Vow at Cenchreæ.**—Objection has frequently been made to this incident, and by implication also to the trustworthiness of the entire book, on the ground that Paul cannot possibly have been so held by Jewish trammels as to take upon himself a vow of the sort described. But in the first place, it is far from certain that our author means to say that it was Paul who fulfilled the vow at Cenchreæ. The transposition of the names Priscilla and Aquila (cf., however, Rom. xvi. 3), bringing the latter next the participle, may be designed to show that it was Aquila and not Paul whose head was shorn. Yet it must be confessed that were it not for the other difficulties connected with the passage, hardly any one would think of passing over Paul, the principal subject in the sentence, and attaching the participle "having shorn" to Aquila. And it is quite compatible with the picture of Paul, as given in the Acts, that he should have been not entirely free from Jewish habits and practices, except in cases where a principle was obviously and particularly at stake. The general credibility of the description of Paul in Acts has already been defended by arguments drawn from his own account of himself in the Epistles, and it is proper to say here only that if the vow was taken by Paul, it was not out of keeping with his character as we have conceived it. Furthermore, there may have been especial reasons why Paul was led to take this vow. In the discouraged, disconsolate mood in which he reached Corinth, he may have fallen back into his former manner of life to a degree that he would have repudiated at other times. It is in writing to the Corinthians that he says he became a Jew to the Jews that he might gain some. It must be remembered that Paul had been a devoted, conscientious Pharisee, and that often feeling and habits outlive convictions and resume their old sway in periods of depression and weariness. The credibility of Acts cannot justly be impeached by presupposing uniform, unvarying consistency on the part of a man like Paul.

**II. From Ephesus to Ephesus.**—The vessel on which Paul embarked for Syria touched at Ephesus. While it was lying in port Paul went on shore, and, as his custom was, spoke in the synagogue of the Jews. He seems to have been greatly encouraged by the reception he met with, but was unable to stay long at Ephesus, since he was eager to reach Jerusalem. There was no more strategic point in all Asia for the preaching of Christianity. Not only was Ephesus the capital of the country where the pro-consul resided and a great commercial and intellectual centre, it was also a seat of the worship of Artemis, whither, on the festivals of the goddess, immense throngs came from all over Asia. Paul's

policy was to teach in great distributing cities, and the advantages of Ephesus, together with the apparent readiness of the Jews to accept his message, made him anxious to return at the earliest possible moment. Hence his trip to Jerusalem and Antioch was very hurried, and we may fairly conjecture that he took the shortest road from Antioch to Ephesus. The haste of the journey has an important bearing upon the Galatian controversy, to which reference has been made in a previous lesson. If by Galatia is meant, not the entire province, but the little district into which the remnants of the invading Gauls had been compressed, Paul must have made a very wide circuit to reach it. But if Galatia means here and in xvi. 6 the Roman province, then all is simple. From Antioch his road lay through the Syrian gates, by the towns of Issos and Tarsus, then northward through the Cilician gates, and westward through Galatia (with churches at Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch) and Phrygia to Ephesus. This route meets all the conditions of the narrative, — it takes him through Galatia and Phrygia *in order*, and brings him to Ephesus by the quickest way.

**III. The Disciples of John.** — The extent and importance of the movement started by John the Baptist are greatly underestimated by Christian writers, even the earliest. John is commonly thought of only as the herald of Jesus, whereas at the start Jesus was only a disciple of John. Even in the New Testament the steps may still be traced by which the important and independent work of John was transformed into a preparation for Jesus. In this lesson we see that Apollos, from Alexandria, and certain men of Ephesus knew the baptism of John, but nothing further. Even in Africa, therefore, and to the shores of the Ægean, his influence had extended. Of Apollos the author gives a remarkably distinct picture by the use of apt descriptive phrases: he was learned, or eloquent; mighty in the Scriptures, — having a knack, that is, of finding spiritual allegories in the Old Testament; fervent in spirit; careful in speech, yet bold and aggressive. But the best trait in his character must be conceded to be a willingness to be taught by Aquila and Priscilla. It reads like a chapter out of George Macdonald, — this story of a learned, eloquent man sitting at the feet of two humble tentmakers to hear of “the way of God.” When he left Ephesus it was with a letter of commendation to the church at Corinth, where his power soon made him prominent, even as the founder of a party opposed to Paul. The twelve men whom Paul met at Ephesus had heard of a Messiah coming with the gift of the Holy Ghost, and had by baptism pledged themselves to wait in righteousness for the coming Christ; but they had not heard that Jesus had appeared, claiming to be the Messiah, or that the Holy Spirit had been given at Pentecost. Therefore Paul had them

baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus, as a symbol of their belief in him as the Messiah, and by the laying on of hands imparted the Holy Spirit, whose presence was manifested by speaking with tongues and prophesying. Into the controversies about these twelve men who knew only the baptism of John, it is, fortunately, needless to enter. It is enough to say that they had heard of the nearness of the Messiah, but had not learned of his actual appearance. The giving of the Spirit by the laying on of the apostle's hands is in harmony with certain passages in the book, but is contradictory to the general trend of teaching, to the effect that the Spirit was immediately and directly bestowed by God.

Paul's expectation, based upon the welcome offered him by the Jews on his first brief visit, proved to be unwarranted. In Ephesus, as elsewhere, the Jews became hostile, and he was forced out of the synagogue into the lecture-hall of one Tyrannus, where he taught for over two years. Of the extraordinary miracles said to have been wrought by the hands of Paul, even by the aprons which he wore while working at his trade and the handkerchiefs with which he wiped the perspiration from his face, it is necessary to say no more than that the account is wholly legendary, and corresponds to similar reports circulated concerning Peter (Acts v. 12-16). With what conscience could Paul, after lending himself to such magic as this, favor the burning of the books of curious arts? The city was renowned for its cultivation of the occult sciences. "Ephesian letters" were famous everywhere. Exorcists abounded; and according to our narrative there were among them seven sons of a member of the Jerusalem hierarchy named Sceva, who used the name of Jesus as a spell over evil spirits, till two of the brothers were set upon and beaten by a man possessed of an evil spirit which refused to recognize their authority. The story, as told, is quite incredible, and can have arisen only in the atmosphere alive with superstitious imaginings which hung about Ephesus.

One of Paul's cares on this third missionary journey was to raise a fund in aid of the poor Christians in Jerusalem; and for this purpose he intended visiting the churches he had founded in Macedonia and Achaia. But not wishing to leave Ephesus till after Pentecost, he sent Timothy and Erastus into Macedonia. Shortly after their departure he wrote the first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. xvi. 1-12).

### TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

Would it have been like Paul to take upon himself a Jewish vow?  
 The relation of John the Baptist to Jesus.  
 Magical arts at Ephesus.



## LESSON XXVIII.

### BUSINESS AND RELIGION.

LESSON PASSAGE, — Acts XIX. 23-41.

**Explanatory Notes.** vs. 24. *Diana* — Artemis, yet really an Asiatic Nature-goddess quite unlike the classic Artemis. vs. 29. *Theatre* — Tiers of seats open to the sky, not a building. *Gaius and Aristarchus* — Cf. xx. 4. vs. 31. *Chief officers* — Asiarchs, wealthy citizens chosen to superintend public festivities. vs. 33. *Alexander* — Probably a well-known Jew, not the Alexander of 2 Tim. iv. 10. vs. 35. *Town clerk* — The recorder or chief magistrate of the city. *Temple-keeper* — Neocoros, or temple-sweeper, usually applied to the cult of the Roman Emperor, but found, in a recently discovered inscription, of Artemis also. vs. 37. *Robbers of temples* — Sacrilegious. vs. 38. *Proconsuls* — A rhetorical plural. vs. 39. *Regular assembly* — Held on stated days, or called in due form.

### QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

For whose worship was Ephesus celebrated? Was the goddess identical with the Greek Artemis or the Roman Diana? From this cult and its name what do we learn about the population and history of Ephesus? Who made trouble for Paul? What testimony is borne to the extent of Paul's influence? Was the hostility based on business or religion? How was the city aroused? What was the theatre? How was Paul protected? Who were the Asiarchs? Who quieted the uproar? How? Was there more than one proconsul? (vs. 38.)

### COMMENTARY.

I. **The Worship of Artemis.** — When the Greek colonists came to Asia Minor, Ephesus was already the seat of the worship of an Eastern Nature-goddess whose many-breasted image was a symbol of fertility or productiveness. Choosing to adapt rather than to destroy, the Greeks found points of contact between this goddess and their own Artemis, and so kept up the worship. Once a year pilgrims came from all over Western Asia Minor to attend the festival of the goddess in the month Artemisium. It was to take advantage of this great concourse that Paul wished

to remain at Ephesus till after Pentecost. Naturally the visitors wished to make offerings to the temple, and also to carry home mementos of their visit; and there was nothing better for both purposes than models of the famous and beautiful temple. Thousands of these little shrines were made, some in terra-cotta, others in bronze or silver; and their manufacture was one of the industries of Ephesus.

But the Jews residing in Ephesus must have felt a contempt for the worship, which probably they did not seek to conceal, partly because it was idolatrous and partly also because of the lingering immorality of the ancient cult. As a Jew Paul shared this feeling, and his Christianity increased it.

II. **Business and Religion.** — At the very beginning of the second century, Pliny, governor of Pontus and Bithynia, wrote to Trajan for advice concerning the treatment of the Christians in his province. From his letter it appears that the "contagion of that superstition" had spread abroad so widely that the temples of the gods had been deserted, the sacred rites languished, and that there was no longer any market for fodder consumed by the animals usually kept at the temples to be sacrificed by the worshippers. In the Roman world, religion as such was not proscribed, — a man might worship what gods he pleased provided he obeyed the laws and observed the cult of the emperor; but assemblies and guilds were carefully watched as breeding-places of insurrections, and interference with social life in any of its phases was sure to cause trouble.

The scenes at Ephesus were typical of many that occurred elsewhere. There, as in Bithynia, a flourishing trade was interfered with. Consequently a chief manufacturer of the beautiful little shrines, modelled after the temple, gathered together his own workmen and others of the same craft, and appealing to their purses first and then to their religious pride, stirred them to a passion of rage against the man who was interfering with their business by condemning idolatry. There seems to have been in vogue as popular watchword a phrase, perhaps borrowed from a prayer or ascription of praise, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians." When this cry was raised by the craftsmen it was caught up by the crowds in the streets, and instantly there was an infuriated mob, all screaming the popular religious phrase. Others were attracted by the shouts, and joined the crowd, swelling the uproar, without the faintest idea what it was all about, only possessed by the idea that for some reason it was necessary to bear vociferous testimony to Artemis of the Ephesians. The picture drawn of the mob is graphic and thrilling.

As the theatre was one of the foci in the life of Ephesus, the temple being the other, the crowds naturally turned thitherward, and it was soon thronged with a wildly shouting multitude, whereof "the more part knew not why they were come together." Two of Paul's companions were captured by the mob, but no violence seems to have been done them; Paul himself, hearing the clamor, was determined to go to the theatre, but his friends restrained him. A certain Alexander, evidently a well-known man in the city, a Jew and not a Jewish Christian, was put forward to address the people; but the choice was unfortunate. He was at once seen to be a Jew, and the feelings of the Jews toward Artemis and her worship were well known. Therefore the din increased, and as at our political conventions the name of a favorite candidate is greeted by a prolonged roar lasting many minutes, so in the theatre at Ephesus for two mortal hours the loud monotonous cry was heard, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians."

When the shouts subsided, the chief local official, the town clerk, or recorder, got a hearing. He spoke as a man sure of his position, confident that the glory of the great Artemis and the sanctity of the image fallen from heaven were unassailable. The whole disturbance therefore, he said, must be due to a personal quarrel between Demetrius and these men, which ought to be settled in the courts, or at least in a regular assembly of the people, since this illegal brawling exposes us to punishment from Rome. So the tumult ended, and the crowds dispersed.

The claim to possess an image fallen from heaven has not been peculiar to Ephesus. Originally, the object of reverence was probably an aerolite which was supposed to have been sent by God to mark a spot desirable for worship. Then an image was fashioned to represent the deity by whom the sign had been given; and by degrees, the sanctity was transferred from the aerolite to the image.

But whenever men believe that they have an object of worship, or a communication from God, which has come into this world from without, and is therefore outside the natural order, there in its essential features is devotion to an image fallen from heaven. Those who speak in defence are in the habit of assuming, as did the recorder of Ephesus, that their position is quite impregnable, and that the whole trouble arises from merely personal whims and notions.

To give a modern instance, the attitude of many Protestants, and of some leaders among them, toward the methods and results of Biblical criticism is only the scene in the theatre at Ephesus over again, with the exception that, fortunately, not mercenary but ignorantly spiritual motives have inspired the hubbub. Demetrius, too, has had his successors, and prophets of religion have

often fallen victims to those whose personal interests were affected by their ethical and religious teachings.

III. **The Officials at Ephesus.** — The excavations conducted at Ephesus by Mr. Wood, together with references in early writers, enable us to test our author's accuracy. There are certain local words in the narrative which, so far as they go, are evidences of credibility.

(a) *The Asiarchs* (vs. 31). "Each of the cities of proconsular Asia at the autumnal equinox assembled its most honorable and opulent citizens, in order to select one to preside over the games to be exhibited that year, at his expense, in honor of the gods and the Roman emperor. Thereupon each city reported the name of the person selected to a general assembly held in some leading city, — as Ephesus, Smyrna, Sardis. This general council . . . selected ten out of the number of candidates, and sent them to the proconsul; and the proconsul apparently chose one of these ten to preside over the rest. This explains how it is that in Acts several Asiarchs are spoken of. [Perhaps, also, the title outlasted the service]" (Thayer). It is difficult to understand how Paul could have had many friends among the Asiarchs; but surely it is possible that their real motive was desire to prevent a riot rather than friendliness toward Paul.

(b) The town-clerk. In the newly discovered inscriptions "the mention of the recorder is especially frequent. His name is employed to authenticate every decree, and to fix every date" (Lightfoot).

(c) The proconsul. Asia was at this time a senatorial province, having its capital at Ephesus. Its governor is rightly called a proconsul. The use of the plural does not necessarily imply that the author fancied the province had two or more governors, for a similar rhetorical, generalizing use of the plural is common among us.

(d) The temple-keeper. "Where Demetrius describes the city of Ephesus as the 'neocoros,' the 'temple-sweeper,' or 'sacristan of the great goddess Artemis,' we find in these inscriptions for the first time a direct example of this term so applied. On one of these 'the city of the Ephesians' is described as 'twice sacristan of the Augusti, according to the decrees of the Senate, and sacristan of Artemis'" (Lightfoot).

### TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

The testimony of Demetrius to the effect of Paul's ministry in Ephesus.

The two foci of Ephesian life.

The description of the mob at Ephesus.

## LESSON XXIX.

### TIMES OF PARTING.

LESSON PASSAGE, — Acts XX. 1-38.

**Explanatory Notes.** — vs. 6. *Days of unleavened bread* — The festival beginning with the Passover and lasting a week. vs. 7. *The first day* — In memory of the resurrection the Christians met on Sunday for the love-feast and Eucharist. This must have been a very early custom in the Church (1 Cor. xvi. 2). vs. 13. *Assos* — A city of Mysia, on the Gulf of Adrammytium, about twenty miles, by land, south of Troas. vs. 14. *Mitylene* — The principal port of Lesbos, on the east coast of the island. vs. 15. *Chios* — An island in the Ægean, off the coast of Lydia, about midway between Lesbos and Samos. *Samos* — An island about opposite the boundary line between Lydia and Caria. *Miletus* — A city of Caria near the mouth of the Mæander, and about thirty-five miles south of Ephesus. vs. 17. *The elders* — *i. e.*, the presbyters (R. V. margin), or bishops (vs. 28), the parish committee of the church in Ephesus. vs. 28. Note the marginal reading in the Revised Version, preferred by the American revisers to that in the text. vs. 35. This saying of Jesus is not found in our Gospels, but is from the ungathered tradition.

### QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

Are the words "Macedonia" and "Greece" used in the popular or the Roman way? At what city did Paul stay longest in Greece? What was the condition of the church there? What change did he make in his plans at Corinth? Why? Who joined the party at Philippi? At what season of the year did Paul leave Philippi? What feast did he hope to keep in Jerusalem? Trace on the map the journey from Philippi to Miletus. What occurred at Troas? What light does the incident throw upon the Christian observance of Sunday? How did Paul travel from Troas to Assos? How far was it? Who met him at Miletus? How does Paul describe his life in Ephesus? (vss. 19, 20, 23, 31.) How was he supported? (vss. 33, 34.) What shadow was over him? (vss. 22-25.) What perils did he foresee for the church of Ephesus? (vss. 24-30.) What side of Paul's nature is shown by this incident?

## COMMENTARY.

I. **In Macedonia and Greece.** — Forced to leave Ephesus, Paul went into Macedonia and Greece, visiting the churches founded on the second missionary journey. He seems to have spent some time in Macedonia, and it was probably during this period that he preached “even unto Illyricum” (Rom. xv. 19). He dreaded to go to Corinth, not knowing the reception he would meet in that distracted church; but the return of Titus reassured him (2 Cor. vii. 6–16), and sending Titus back again, he himself followed after a little. This was his third visit to Corinth (2 Cor. xiii. 1), but when the second was made we are not informed. As on his first visit, the Jews in Corinth were hostile to him; and becoming aware of a plot against his life, he suddenly changed his plans, and retraced his steps through Macedonia. The Passover week was spent in Philippi, with the church which of all he established was nearest to his heart, and especially with his friend whose presence we noticed on the voyage from Troas to Philippi, and who now, after a long sojourn in Philippi, was ready to be his travelling companion again.

II. **The First Day of the Week.** — At first the Jewish Christians kept both Saturday and Sunday, — the former from ancestral usage, the latter in honor of the resurrection. In Gentile churches, however, only Sunday would be observed; and among believing Jews the Sabbath would gradually become of less significance than Sunday. By the middle of the second century Sunday had become the uniform day of Christian meeting. Pliny’s letter to Trajan, referred to in the last lesson, contains a description of these weekly meetings: “They were accustomed on a stated day to assemble before light, and to sing responsively (?) a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by an oath, not for the commission of any crime, but that they would do no theft, robbery, or adultery, that they would not break faith or deny a trust when called upon. After these ceremonies were over their custom was to separate, and meet again to take food, yet a common and innocent meal.” The meal is, of course, the love-feast with the Eucharist, in memory of the last supper taken by Jesus with his disciples.

At Troas the Christians were assembled in an upper room. There is mention of lights, perhaps because of the frequent charges

of immorality levelled against the Christians; but the "many lights" in a small over-crowded room help us to explain the drowsiness of Eutychus. No preacher will doubt that it was the bad air of the room instead of the long sermon, as even Luke supposes, that made him fall asleep. The story runs that in his slumber he broke through the lattice window and fell to the ground, where he lay as dead until Paul brought him to life again. Instead of sailing from Troas to Assos, Paul decided to walk. There is said to have been a paved road between the two cities, and the distance was short,—less than a day's journey on foot. Taking ship at Assos, Paul sailed to Mitylene. The next night the vessel lay under the lee of Chios, and the second day afterward reached Miletus, where Paul had appointed to meet the elders of the church of Ephesus.

III. **The Farewell at Miletus.**—It is important to observe that the representatives of the church are called elders or presbyters in verse 17, and bishops in verse 28. Primitively the two words were identical in meaning. The governing body, usually selected by the church, was called indifferently bishops or elders. At this time, therefore, one church had many bishops; now one bishop has charge of many churches. At the very beginning of the speech we are conscious of a shadow hanging over the apostle. It is the hardships of his life in Ephesus that he recalls, and not its successes; and it soon becomes manifest that he apprehends trouble at Jerusalem.

The Jews have just sought to kill him in Corinth; it is the plots of the Jews that he remembers in Ephesus; but now he is on his way to the chief city of Israel, where he can hardly expect to fare better than at Ephesus and Corinth. In view of his forebodings he warns the elders that they may expect no more counsel or help from him. He has done his best publicly and privately, and feels no reason to reproach himself for his work in Ephesus; but now he solemnly reminds the representatives of the church that its future depends upon them. It must be assailed from without, and weakened by dissensions within; yet if, following his example, the elders keep the church true to its ideal of unselfish service, it will stand. Paul's idea is that the church will be strong only if it labors to help the weak.

In verse 28 there is an exceedingly interesting difference of

reading about which critics still disagree. Does the writer mean to speak of the blood of the Lord or the blood of God as the price by which the church was purchased? It cannot be denied that the best manuscript authority favors "the Church of God," for Aleph and B are on its side, yet these manuscripts sometimes agree in a reading that is undoubtedly spurious. Since "the Church of God" is a more common phrase than "the Church of the Lord," it is probable that here the more familiar has been substituted for the less familiar expression, and that the author, or Paul, did not intend to speak of the blood of God.

That this speech cannot be a verbatim report of what Paul said may be taken for granted, yet it may be regarded as fairly representative. Of this, as of the speeches previously studied, we are compelled to say that the form is entirely Luke's, but the substance is reasonably authentic. The substance of Paul's preaching, "repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus," marks the two stages of John's baptism and the preaching of the Messiahship of Jesus (cf. xix. 1-7). Whether or not Paul ever saw Ephesus again must remain unsettled for the present. If he did, this author was unaware of the fact (and thus an early date for our document is established), or else he has reported accurately a prediction by Paul which he knew to have been unfulfilled, thus evincing the authenticity of his narrative.

This lesson shows us a side of Paul's nature which is often overlooked. He was a man of extraordinarily warm, sympathetic feeling, very dependent upon his friends, and needing companionship. This aching tenderness of heart makes more comprehensible the impulsive character of his mind, which we have frequently noticed already, and helps to account for his obvious inconsistencies.

### TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

- The Christian Sunday, — its origin and early history.
- The Lord's Supper in the Early Church.
- "A house-going pastor makes a church-going people."
- Instances of Paul's tender sympathy gathered from the Epistles.



## LESSON XXX.

### “BOUND IN THE SPIRIT.”

LESSON PASSAGE, — Acts XXI. 1-36.

**Explanatory Notes.** vs. 1. *Cos* — An island in the Ægean, about forty miles south of Miletus, nearly opposite the south-western corner of Asia Minor, celebrated as “the birthplace of Hippocrates, the physician, and Apelles, the artist.” *Rhodes* — An island off the coast of Lycia, some fifty miles from Cos; the famous Colossus, seventy cubits high, which once stood near the harbor, was destroyed by an earthquake in 224 B. C. *Patara* — A seaport of Lycia, perhaps forty miles from Rhodes. vs. 3. *Tyre* — A Phœnician city on the Mediterranean. vs. 7. *Ptolemais* — A coast town of Phœnicia, about thirty miles south of Tyre, and half way between Tyre and Cæsarea. vs. 8. *Philip, the evangelist* — A travelling preacher (cf. Acts vi. 1-6, viii. 1-40). vs. 10. *Agabus* — Cf. xi. 28. vs. 15. *Baggage* — Authorized Version, carriages, often misunderstood. vs. 26. *Mnason of Cyprus* — Otherwise unknown. vs. 23. *A vow* — A Nazarite vow, the symbol of which was an unshorn head. By identifying himself with the four, and paying the charges incident upon the release from the vow, Paul was regarded as having completed the full time and earned the advantage accruing to the vow. vs. 27. *In the temple* — *i. e.*, In the court beyond the court of the Gentiles. vs. 58. *Defiled this holy place* — On the wall of the second enclosure were inscriptions forbidding Gentiles to go further on pain of death. vs. 29. *Trophimus* — Cf. xx. 4. vs. 31. *Chief captain of the band* — Officer in command of the Roman troops stationed in the castle of Antonia. vs. 35. *The stairs* — Two flights of steps led from the castle down to the temple enclosure.

### QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

Trace Paul's course from Miletus to Jerusalem. For what were Cos and Rhodes famous? Where did Paul change ships? What warning was given Paul at Tyre? Where was Ptolemais? How did the company travel from Ptolemais to Cæsarea? Whom did Paul visit in Cæsarea? What is meant by “prophets” and “prophesy”? What have we previously learned about Agabus? What symbolical act did he perform? What did Paul say? Who accompanied Paul's party from Cæsarea to Jerusalem? How was Paul received? What was his reputation among the believing Jews? Was it deserved? What

proposition was made to him? What was the Nazarite vow? Did Paul assent? How and by whom were the people excited against him? Where was Paul at the time? Where was he dragged? Who rescued him? Where was Paul brought? Where were the Roman barracks?

### COMMENTARY.

**I. En Voyage.** After farewells had been spoken at Miletus, Paul and his companions set sail once more, and made an easy run to Cos. If Luke, the physician, was really on board, this island must have had especial interest for him, since it was a chief seat of the worship of Æsculapius, beside being the reputed birth-place of Hippocrates, the "Father of Medicine." If there is any foundation for the tradition that Luke was a painter also, Cos was doubly interesting, because it was the birthplace of Apelles, as well as of Hippocrates. Another day brought the voyagers to Rhodes, where Paul undoubtedly saw the shattered fragments of the celebrated Colossus, one of the "Seven Wonders of the World." At Patara they were fortunate enough to find a vessel bound directly for Tyre, in which they took passage, arriving at the coast of Phœnicia after two or three days.

The verb used, "having found," carries the idea that the disciples were so few and insignificant that diligent search was needed to discover them. But they had heard of Paul, and their fear lest harm should befall him in Jerusalem was interpreted as a warning from the Spirit that Paul should not trust himself in the Holy City. The Spirit, speaking through his friends, bade him stay; but the Spirit, speaking in his own mind, bade him go. Is the Spirit divided? Our author does not perceive the difficulty. For us, who view the intimations of the Spirit only as the expressions of one's best judgment, there is none.

**II. In Cæsarea.** More importance attaches to this brief account of Paul's visit to Cæsarea than appears on the surface. Philip, at whose house he stayed, was one of the seven "deacons" chosen to appease the disputes between Hebrews and Hellenists concerning the "daily visitation." Undoubtedly he, like Stephen, held the larger, more universal thought, which afterward found its champion in Paul. Philip, therefore, would be in closer sympathy with the Apostle to the Gentiles than most of the brethren in Jerusalem. Moreover, Philip himself had led the way in the conversion of the Samaritans, and had even baptized an Ethiopian eunuch. When Paul and Philip met, it was the coming together of the two most conspicuous advocates of the larger Christianity.

Furthermore, Philip was an "evangelist." The term is commonly used among us to denote the writers of the four Gospels,

but originally it was applied to a travelling preacher who rehearsed the words and the deeds of Jesus. During the period of oral transmission, each evangelist would select—not deliberately, but with unconscious instinct—such incidents of the life of Jesus, and such sayings, as fell in best with his habitual conception of Christianity. Hence Philip would recall and relate, perhaps with brighter coloring and disproportionate emphasis, the more universal utterances of Jesus, and he would naturally fasten his attention upon those circumstances in the early history of the Church which were of similar character.

Now, the author of the “we sections” in the Acts was with Paul at Cæsarea, and must have been intimate with Philip. Later on we shall find ground for believing that the author of the “we sections” is the author of the entire book, and also of the third Gospel, and that at the house of Philip the evangelist, and from him, Luke gathered much of the material which he has incorporated into the Gospel and the Acts. Again, at Cæsarea, Paul had a warning of the fate that was in store for him at Jerusalem. The same Agabus who had foretold the famine in the days of Claudius, came down to Cæsarea, and binding his own feet and hands with Paul’s girdle, reviving thus the ancient symbolism of the prophets, predicted that so the Jews in Jerusalem would treat the owner of the girdle.

But Paul was not to be swerved from his purpose, though his tender heart could hardly endure the tears and entreaties of his friends; and he and his company, with additional friends from Cæsarea, were soon on their way to Jerusalem.

III. **The Nazarite Vow.**—It was with a quiver of apprehension that the elders of the church in Jerusalem heard of Paul’s arrival. Startling reports had reached the mother church of his conduct and teaching in Gentile cities; and there was a feeling that by his “disorderliness” with regard to the law he was compromising Christianity in the eyes of the Jews, and depriving Israel of its rightful honor as the peculiar people of God.

While Paul had been preaching at Corinth and Ephesus the church of Jerusalem had grown in numbers, but not in thought or grace. Under the leadership of James it had become narrower in principles, while it was increasing in size; and its members were “all zealous for the law.” Their objection to Paul was not that he taught the Gentiles to accept Christ, but that he urged Jews to forsake Moses. The distinction is obvious. The quarrel with Paul was that he taught *Jews* “not to circumcise their children, or walk after the customs.”

So far as Paul’s theory went, the charge was false; yet there can be little doubt that in the heat of his indignation and in contempt for “beggarly rudiments” Paul had furnished abundant evidence to

support the accusation. Yet to prevent an outbreak Paul was willing to comply with the request of the elders that he should identify himself with four men who were about fulfilling a Nazarite vow, and take upon his shoulders the charges for release. With the conception we have formed of Paul's character and temperament, there is no reason to doubt our author's veracity. Paul would not avoid personal danger by staying away from Jerusalem, but he would not jeopardize his influence in the Church and the Church's influence in Jerusalem by stubbornness in a matter which he deemed indifferent.

**IV. The Arrest in the Temple.** — "In the midst [of the first enclosure of the temple], and not far from it, was the second, to be gone up to by a few steps; this was encompassed by a stone wall for a partition, with an inscription which forbade any foreigner to go in under pain of death" (Jos. Ant. xv. 11, 5). It is said that along the inner wall of this second court—known as the Court of the Women, because beyond it no woman was allowed to go—were "small chambers in which the Nazarites used to live while fulfilling the last seven days of their vow" (Lindsay).

Knowing Paul's devotion to his Gentile friends and his determination that no Jewish rites should come between him and them, "certain Jews from Asia," seeing Paul in the inner court and supposing that Trophimus, whom they had seen with him in the city, must have accompanied him there also, raised an outcry against Paul as one who was known to be in general opposed to the peculiar people, and who had now exemplified his teaching by bringing an alien within the holy precincts. Instantly Paul was attacked by the crowd, and hustled out into the Court of the Gentiles; and the doors between the two enclosures were shut behind him. He might have been torn to pieces by the frenzied mob but for the appearance upon the scene of Roman soldiers, whose presence made the assailants give way for a moment. Doubly bound and guarded, in an uproar like that which had arisen in the theatre of Ephesus, Paul was hurried away to the Castle of Antonia,—actually "borne of the soldiers for the violence of the crowd." The fortress was located on the north side of the temple area, and was approached by steps, on one of which Paul halted, and made to the multitude an address, which we shall study in the next lesson.

## TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

"The work of an evangelist."

Symbolism in the ancient prophets.

The growth of the church of Jerusalem.

Was it consistent or right in Paul to identify himself with the Nazarites?

## LESSON XXXI.

### PAUL'S ADDRESS TO THE PEOPLE.

LESSON PASSAGE, — Acts XXI. 37-XXII. 30.

**Explanatory Notes.** — vs. 38. *The Egyptian* — An Egyptian Jew who inspired and led a company of insurgents. *The Assassins* — Sicarii, extreme zealots who practised secret assassinations. They have been compared with the Thugs of India. vs. 40. *Hebrew* — Aramaic, the popular dialect. vs. 5. *The elders* — The Sanhedrin. vs. 25. *The thongs* — Either the cords with which he was bound (R. V. text) or the lashes of the scourge with which he was to be flogged (R. V. margin). vs. 28. *With a great sum* — “Under the first Cæsars the freedom of Rome was obtained with great difficulty, and cost a large sum; but in the latter days of Claudius these prized rights were freely sold.” *A Roman born* — *i. e.* Paul's father was a Roman citizen, but how he had obtained the citizenship is uncertain. vs. 29. *Bound him* — Not for safe-keeping, but for punishment.

#### QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

“Into the castle” — what castle? Who was the chief captain? Who was “the Egyptian”? Who were “the Assassins”? In what language did Paul speak to the people? What evidence does this bear as to the vernacular, and the language which Jesus used? Who was Gamaliel? What is “the Way”? Tell the story of Paul's conversion as related here. How does it compare with other accounts in Acts of the same event? What vision did Paul receive in Jerusalem? What commission was then given him? What brought his speech to an end? How is the conduct of the mob described? How did the chief captain intend to “examine” Paul? What preparations were made? What caused a stay of proceedings? How had Paul obtained the Roman citizenship? Before what court was Paul arraigned on the next morning?

#### COMMENTARY.

I. **The Egyptian.** “There came out of Egypt to Jerusalem one that said he was a prophet, and advised the multitude of the common people to go with him to the Mount of Olives. . . . He said further that he would show them from hence how, at his command, the walls of Jerusalem would fall down; and he prom-

ised them that he would procure them an entrance into the city through those walls when they were fallen down. Now when Felix was informed of these things . . . he attacked the Egyptian and the people that were with him. He also slew four hundred of them, and took two hundred alive. But the Egyptian himself escaped out of the fight, but did not appear any more" (Jos. Ant. xx. 8, 6).

When the Roman officer arrested Paul in the temple he supposed him to be this escaped, but now returned, Egyptian. The extreme party of the Pharisees, in their detestation of the Romans and their zeal for independence, stopped at nothing, but with daggers concealed in their garments made short work of their enemies on the public street, or wherever they chanced to meet them. Learning that Paul was not the man suspected, the chiliarch allowed him to address the people from the steps of the castle of Antonia. Making the gesture usual with him to command attention, and using the vernacular Aramaic, Paul spoke to the multitude.

II. **A Speech of Conciliation.** Paul's address, whether made by him or put into his mouth by "Luke," is a singularly clever piece of rhetoric. With consummate adroitness he lays hold upon every point of agreement between himself and his hearers, and staves off the controversy as long as he possibly can. Before him were infuriated Jews, zealous for the law of Moses and the traditions of the fathers, and he begins by putting himself on an equality with them, commending their zeal. Undoubtedly in Jerusalem, although not in the country district of Galilee where Jesus was born and reared, both Greek and Aramaic were spoken and understood. But the stricter Jews extended their hatred of Greek culture even to the language, and with them, even in Paul's time, the use of the Greek version of the Old Testament was discountenanced. It helped Paul to a hearing, therefore, that he was able, and chose, to speak in Aramaic, — because he spoke in their own language they were the more quiet.

He begins by declaring himself a Jew, born, to be sure, in an alien land, but brought up in Jerusalem under the tuition of Gamaliel, who was revered as a light of the law. Their zeal for God he also had known, and for the law of the fathers he had

been no less strenuous. Indeed, he had even gone beyond them in ardent devotion, for had he not persecuted the sect of the Christians, as the authorities could bear witness, if they would? His introduction is, therefore, a sympathetic recognition of their zeal, which he could understand perfectly, because it had once been in him, also. How, then, had the change been wrought?

As one enjoying the full confidence of the Sanhedrin, he had been sent on a mission of persecution to Damascus; but just before reaching the city he had that wonderful experience in which he both saw and heard Jesus of Nazareth, whom — not merely whose disciples — he was persecuting. In Damascus, the meaning of the vision was interpreted to him by one Ananias, who was “a devout man, according to the law, and well reported of by all the Jews.” Evidently; therefore, whatever was said to him by Ananias must be in accord with the law, for which they were so zealous, and in which Ananias was so devout. The vision, then, had been sent him by “the God *of our fathers*,” who thus declared his approval of Jesus, and laid upon Paul the duty of being a witness *to all men* of what he had seen and heard. In Jerusalem, the Holy City, and even in the holy place, while he was praying another vision was vouchsafed to him, and the Lord, to whose rightful authority God himself had borne witness, charged him to go unto the Gentiles.

The skill displayed by Paul in trying to get himself and the crowd on common ground, in emphasizing the strictness and ardor of his youth, which made it highly improbable that he would be in his present position without adequate reason, and especially in connecting the crucial moments of his history with the devout Ananias and the temple in Jerusalem, makes this speech a masterpiece of rhetoric.

It should be observed, also, that some of the differences between this account of his conversion and other reports elsewhere in the Acts are to be explained by Paul's rhetorical purpose. In Acts xxvi. 16-18, it appears that the commission to the Gentiles was given to Paul by Jesus himself; according to ix. 15-17, it was revealed to Ananias, but not directly to Paul; here, however, it is distinctly said that no intimation of his career was given by Jesus himself, nor was it disclosed by Ananias, save in the indefinite “all men,” but it was first revealed to Paul while he was

praying in the temple of Jerusalem. It was evidently Paul's purpose to postpone the mention of the Gentiles as long as possible, knowing that the bare mention of that name would excite anew the wild passion of the Jews. Again, in ix. 10 Ananias is called a disciple of Jesus, but here it was more to Paul's purpose to represent him as a devout and highly esteemed Jew, devoted to the law.

III. **Civis Romanus sum.** When the word "Gentiles" was actually pronounced, the crowd went mad again, and with violent cries and frenzied gestures demanded that he should be put to death. But no real charge had been made against him, — therefore Lysias decided to put Paul to the torture, that he might learn of what he was accused. It was customary at Rome to torture slaves, and in the Empire even a free man was subject to it in certain circumstances. But to scourge a Roman citizen, before he had been condemned, or even formally accused, was a heinous fault. Paul's quick question (vs. 25) filled the centurion with consternation, and the chief captain also was terrified at the thought of what he had done and was about to do. The torture was immediately abandoned, and the crime of which he was accused was left to be found out by examination before the Sanhedrin on the morrow.

It cannot be ascertained how Paul obtained the Roman citizenship. As he was free born, his father must also have held it. Perhaps his father had purchased it, as Lysias had, with a great price; it may be that he had rendered distinguished service on some occasion, in return for which this great privilege had been bestowed upon him. If, however, our speculation as to the synagogue of the Libertines be correct (see note on Acts vi. 7), Paul's father may have been a manumitted slave, a prisoner taken in war who had so obtained the franchise. This seems to be very plausible; but it is only a conjecture, resting mainly upon a somewhat doubtful interpretation. But it is hypercritical to deny that Paul was a Roman citizen merely because we have no information as to the way in which he obtained the right.

### TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

What language did Jesus ordinarily use?  
 Paul's speech considered as a piece of rhetoric.  
 The Roman citizenship.



## LESSON XXXII.

### PAUL BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN.

LESSON PASSAGE,—Acts XXIII. 1-35.

**Explanatory Notes.** vs. 2. *Ananias* — Son of Nebedæus, high priest c. 47-59 A. D. vs. 3. *Whited wall* — The Jews were accustomed to whitewash their tombs, that they might not be defiled by inadvertently coming near them. vs. 8. *The Sadducees* — “The doctrine of the Sadducees is this: that souls die with their bodies” (Jos. Ant. xviii. 1, 4). vs. 16. *Paul’s sister’s son* — Nothing is known about Paul’s relatives. vs. 23. *Spearmen* — The word is unusual and its meaning uncertain, but this is the generally accepted translation. *Third hour* — 9 P. M. vs. 24. *Felix, the governor* — A freedman of the imperial family, who “with all manner of cruelty and lust exercised royal functions in the spirit of a slave” (Tacitus). Procurator from c. 52 to c. 60. vs. 31. *Antipatris* — About forty miles from Jerusalem. vs. 35. *Herod’s palace* — Cæsarea was built by Herod, and his palace was now occupied by the Roman procurator. Paul was treated with exceptional kindness.

### QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

Before what court was Paul first put on trial? Was it really a trial? (Acts xxii. 30.) What does Paul say of his life prior to his conversion? What insult was offered him? How did Paul retort? Can Paul have been ignorant that it was the high priest who addressed him? How did Paul divide the Sanhedrin? Can Paul have called himself a Pharisee? Was this perfectly ingenuous? What was the result of his *ruse*? What vision is described? (vs. 11.) What conspiracy was formed against Paul? What was the plot of the conspirators? Who disclosed it? What measures did Lysias take? Give the substance of the letter which he sent to Felix. Was it entirely candid? (vs. 27.) Where was Antipatris? How was Paul received by Felix? Where was he kept in custody?

## COMMENTARY.

I. **Paul's Disingenuousness.** On the basis of this narrative Paul cannot be acquitted of lack of candor. How, in the first place, can we understand his plea that he did not recognize the high priest who had ordered him to be smitten, and whom he had passionately called a whited wall? Even if we grant that Paul had had trouble with his eyes since the blinding vision near Damascus,— and upon this many apologetes lay great emphasis,— it is hardly possible that in a small room Paul, who was thoroughly familiar with the arrangement and methods of the court, should not have known that the man who sat to judge him was the high priest.

That Paul recognized but one high priest, him who had passed into the heavens, and bore testimony to this belief in his reply, is simply an expediency of apologetics. Some have contended that at this time Ananias was not actually the high priest, but only a *locum tenens*, yet of this there is no satisfactory evidence. There was nothing particularly blameworthy in Paul's outburst of wrath at the illegal and indecent order to smite him on the mouth,— in fact we rather admire and applaud his exhibition of manly spirit. It is his apology that is unworthy.

The only plausible explanation is that Paul was speaking ironically, as if to say, "How could I suppose that so shameless an order emanated from the high priest?" But our choice between this explanation and that which, taking the facts as they are given, ascribes disingenuousness to Paul must be determined somewhat by the verdict upon the next episode.

Was Paul a Pharisee? Would he have allowed Peter to call him so in Antioch, or in the churches of Galatia? Was it merely because he held the distinctive tenets of Phariseism that he was accused? There can be but one answer to these questions. And it is clearly said that Paul spoke as he did for a purpose: it was because he perceived both Pharisees and Sadducees in the council before which he was standing that he declared himself a Pharisee, suffering for the hope of the Pharisees, with the sole design of dividing the court on party lines, and turning against each other the passions which both were directing toward him.

The effect was not precisely what he expected and desired, for although some of the Pharisees took sides with him, the tumult became so great that between the two parties he came near being torn to pieces, and was opportunely dragged away by the soldiers. It was a clever trick, and partially successful, but it was a trick nevertheless.

Paul deliberately and intentionally misstated his position, that he might set Pharisees and Sadducees by the ears, and break up the court. It was a piece of ingenious disingenuousness, in the face of which we cannot help putting the worst construction on his apology for "reviling" the high priest.

Incidentally, it should be remarked, that this is in entire harmony with the picture of Paul given us throughout the Acts; and if our author were intending to glorify Paul and put him in the best possible light, he would hardly have related this compromising utterance. In view of the motive actually assigned for Paul's words, it is going almost to a ridiculous extreme to represent this as part of the author's persistent endeavor to make Paul out a friend of the law, and by no means so opposed to the Jerusalem church as he really was. Paul was not always perfectly candid or self-consistent, — men of his temperament seldom are. It was the overwrought, nervous condition which made the scene before the Sanhedrin possible that made him susceptible to the vision which came on the following night.

**II. The Plot of the Jews.** The administration of Felix marks the beginning of the open contest with Rome. The fanatical portion of the Jewish community became more bitter and desperate. Assassinations were frequent. It was during his governorship that "the Sicarii made their appearance, a still more fanatical faction of the patriots, who deliberately adopted as their special task the removal of their political opponents by assassination. Armed with short daggers (*sicae*) from which they received their name, they mixed among the crowds, especially during the festival season, and unobserved in the press stabbed their opponents. . . . These political murders were so frequent that soon no one any longer felt safe in Jerusalem" (Schürer).

Hence the atmosphere of the time was favorable to just such a plot as was formed to destroy Paul. The plan was to have Paul summoned before the Sanhedrin for a second hearing, and murder

him on the way to the court-room. This hatred of Paul is perfectly explicable in the circumstances. The zealots were inflamed with religious ardor and fervent devotion to Israel, which was oppressed by the Romans. Hence it was easy to enlist them against Paul, who was supposed to be even more hostile to the law than the Romans, a renegade besides, and to have taught the Jews in the Dispersion to forsake the customs of Moses. But fortunately for Paul, his nephew heard of the conspiracy, and brought word of it to his uncle, who sent him to Lysias with the information.

III. **The Flight to Cæsarea.** The number of soldiers sent as a guard to Paul seems unnecessarily large; in truth, it is hardly likely that four hundred and seventy men were sent away from Jerusalem at such a time on such an errand. But all ancient writers are prone to exaggerate numbers. Moreover, the author always represents the Romans as kindly disposed toward Paul; by delicate touches here and there he gives us a clear and very favorable impression of Lysias, and though the personality of other Romans with whom Paul had to do is not so agreeable, as officials they treat him with invariable kindness and courtesy. Felix, for instance, is charged with bribery and trying to curry favor with the Jews; but he receives Paul with dignity, and permits friends to visit him when they please.

The letter sent with Paul by Lysias to Felix is compact and business-like. Naturally the chief captain glosses over the fact that he had bound Paul for the lash, and speaks as if he had known of his Roman citizenship from the first, and for that reason had interfered to deliver him from the clutches of the mob.

### TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

The ethical quality of Paul's subterfuge.

The temper of the Jews at this time, as shown in the wild frenzy of the mobs, the quarrel in the Sanhedrin, and the conspiracy against Paul.

Was Paul living "in good conscience before God" while he was persecuting the Christians?

## LESSON XXXIII.

### PAUL BEFORE FELIX.

LESSON PASSAGE, — Acts XXIV. 1-27.

**Explanatory Notes.** — vs. 1. *Elders* — Probably members of the Sanhedrin. *Orator* — Presumably a Roman advocate, and hence able to present the case against Paul according to the forms of Roman law. vs. 5. *The Nazarenes* — The Jews called the followers of Jesus, not Christians, which would recognize Jesus as the Christ, but Nazarenes. vs. 6-8. Observe the omissions from the Authorized Version. vs. 10. *Beckoned* — *i. e.*, by a nod. vs. 17. *Offerings* — If closely connected with “to bring,” this must refer to certain festival offerings; but probably the construction is loose, and Paul refers to the offerings in fulfilment of the Nazarite vow. vs. 24. *Drusilla* — Daughter of Herod Agrippa I. (Acts xii. 23), grandson of Herod the Great. vs. 27. *Porcius Festus* — A Roman governor, of whom almost nothing is known; he died in office after an administration of about two years.

### QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

Who accused Paul before Felix? What was the charge? Was it based on political or religious grounds, or on both? What was Paul's answer to the charge of sedition? What did he reply to the accusation of heresy? How did he answer the charge of sacrilege? How did Felix dispose of the case? How was Paul treated as a prisoner? How did Paul speak at the private hearing before Felix and Drusilla? What was the effect upon Felix? Who succeeded Felix? What was the character of Felix as shown in this passage?

### COMMENTARY.

I. **Felix, the Governor.** — Felix was a freedman of the imperial family, who owed his high position in spite of his lowly birth to the great influence at court of his brother Pallas. By reason also of his brother's power over Nero he was emboldened to commit all manner of crimes, trusting, and rightly, as the event proved, that he should escape unpunished. The compliments of Tertullus were bare-faced flattery; for although Felix waged relentless war against

the "robbers" and the "Sicarii," the country had no peace during his administration. He captured one prominent chief of the robbers by treachery, in violation of his pledge of safe conduct, and caused the murder of Jonathan, the high priest, whose offence was that "he frequently gave him admonitions about governing the Jewish affairs better than he did" (Jos. Ant. xx. 8, 5).

That he was open to bribery appears from the statement that "he expected money would be given him of Paul." While the apostle was a prisoner at Cæsarea trouble arose in the city between Jewish and Syrian inhabitants, in which Felix sided with the Syrians, slew many of the Jews, and allowed his soldiers to plunder some of their dwellings. In consequence of this he was accused by the Jews before Nero, but escaped because of his brother's importunities. Only the firmest and most discreet of governors could have held Jerusalem quiet during the trying days of his governorship; but Felix, "exercising royal functions in the spirit of a slave," utterly without the typical Roman virtues, fanned the fire of hatred against Rome, and made war inevitable.

In his private life Felix was as dishonorable as in his public career. Soon after coming to Judæa he became enamoured of Drusilla, sister of Herod Agrippa II., and wife of Azizus, king of Emesa, whom, by the aid of a magician named Simon, a Cypriote Jew, he persuaded to desert her husband and marry him. It was the son of Felix and Drusilla who, together with his wife, perished in the great eruption of Vesuvius. When before the "Roman libertine and the profligate princess" Paul spoke of righteousness, self-control, and judgment to come, Felix, conscious of his injustice, and with the evidence of his licentiousness actually at his side, may well have trembled. It was with the hope of getting money from Paul that he gave him kind treatment during his captivity, and then with the hope of placating the Jews and dissuading them from presenting charges against him at Rome that he left Paul in bonds when he laid down his office.

**II. The Accusation and Paul's Answer.**—In the indictment drawn against Paul before Felix there are three counts, to each of which Paul makes answer.

(a) The first charge is purely political,—"a pestilent fellow and a mover of insurrections among all the Jews throughout the world." As has already been intimated, this was a common charge in the time of Felix, when the country was full of insurgents, and the nation seemed always on the very eve of an uprising; and our study of Paul's life shows that the charge was not baseless. In Asia Minor, in Macedonia and Greece, he had been the cause of Jewish disturbances, which, however, were never directed against Rome,—a fact cleverly concealed by Tertullus.

Paul's answer is that neither in the temple, the synagogues, nor the city had he disputed with any man or gathered about him an excited crowd. Were there any witnesses brought forward by the Jews? Yet the alleged offence must have been very recent, since it was only twelve days since he entered Jerusalem; and therefore witnesses might easily have been produced, had any been available. As for insurrection outside of Jerusalem, where were the witnesses? And yet there were in Jerusalem certain Jews from Asia who might have been brought to Cæsarea to substantiate the charge, had his accusers dared to offer them as witnesses. With respect to the first count, therefore, Paul denies the accusation, and challenges proof.

(b) Paul was charged with heresy, — a ringleader of the sect, or heresy, of the Nazarenes. Like a good rhetorician, Tertullus puts his weakest argument between two strong ones. For Felix would naturally care very little about "questions of Jewish law" and accusations of heresy. One supposition, however, deserves consideration. If we were sure that the "Chrestus" of whom Suetonius speaks — as the cause of the tumults at Rome which resulted in the edict of Claudius — was really Christ, and that the conflicts were between Jews and Jewish Christians, it would be a plausible conjecture that Tertullus took advantage of Felix's memory of that fact to help the case against Paul, whom he represented as a stirrer-up of trouble. Moreover, there was a feeling at Rome against secret societies and religious guilds, which possibly Tertullus sought to arouse in Felix, and direct against Paul, "ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes."

Paul admits the truth of the charge, but denies that the Nazarenes can be called a sect, or heresy, since he, the alleged ringleader, is worshipping the God of the fathers in full acceptance of all things written in the law and the prophets, and in the hope, which the Jews also cherish, of a resurrection of both just and unjust. Therefore the charge falls to the ground so far as religious heresy is concerned; and on its civil side the charge is not valid, since he exercised himself "to have a conscience void of offence toward God and man always."

(c) The third count was that Paul had sought to profane the temple. This was a charge of which the Romans, who had learned to respect Jewish scruples in such matters, could and would take account. A charge of sacrilege, if proved, would probably have brought the death penalty.

Paul's rejoinder is that he had acted as a devout and faithful Jew. In saying that he came to bring alms to the nation he puts a little varnish on the fact, for he had brought contributions only to the needy Jewish Christians. But Paul declares that he was found in the temple because he had come up to Jerusalem

expressly to worship and to bring alms and offerings. Moreover, he was a Jew ("my nation"), and therefore had a right to pass beyond the wall of the Gentiles. Again, besides being a Jew, he had gone through a special process of purification, which made it all the more unlikely that he could have "assayed to profane the temple."

Paul has made complete and irrefutable answer to the specific charges against him, and now in conclusion he reverts to the tumultuous proceedings a week before in the Sanhedrin. What charge, he asks, did the supreme Jewish court formulate against me? What fault did they find in me except the declaration that I was standing for the hope of the fathers, which threw the court into uproarious confusion? In this account of the trial before Felix we seem to have a thoroughly orderly and trustworthy tradition. In rendering judgment Felix deferred the case until the coming down of Lysias, the chief captain.

III. **The Accession of Festus.**—For the chronology of Paul's life it is desirable to fix accurately, if possible, the year in which Festus succeeded Felix as procurator of Judæa. We are told by Josephus that Felix was followed to Rome by Jews who accused him before Nero, and that he escaped because of his brother's influence over Nero. But Pallas was poisoned by Nero in the year 62, which is therefore our ultimate date for the recall of Felix. Josephus further states that Burrus was alive while the ambassadors were in Rome, but Burrus was put to death early in 62 A. D. Therefore, since travel by water seems to have been practically suspended during the winter months, the envoys cannot have reached Rome later than the autumn of 61 A. D.

After the death of Festus his successor was appointed, and reached Judæa in the autumn of 62. If, therefore, Festus took office in 61, only one year is allowed for the events of his administration, which seems quite too brief. Therefore there is pretty general agreement that the date of the recall of Felix was about the year 60, although it may have been 61.

### TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

The internal condition of Judæa during the administration of Felix. (Cf. Jos. Ant., XX. vii., viii.; War, ii., xii., xiii.)

The charges against Paul, and his defence.

Did the Jews expect a resurrection of both just and unjust?



## LESSON XXXIV.

### PAUL BEFORE FESTUS.

LESSON PASSAGE. — Acts XXV. 1-27.

**Explanatory Notes.** vs. 11. *I appeal* — The technical phrase by which the case was transferred from the provincial governor to the court in Rome. vs. 12. *The council* — In administering justice the procurators were assisted by a council of “ assessors.” vs. 13. *Agrippa, the king* — Agrippa II., brother of Drusilla, king of the dominions of Philip and Lysanias (cf. Luke iii. 1.), to which Nero added parts of Galilee and Perea. Cæsarea Philippi was his capital. *Bernice* — Sister of Agrippa, notorious for her vices. vs. 19. *Religion* — Cf. xvii. 22. In A. V. and R. V. margin “superstition.” “Festus prudently uses this *vox media*, leaving it to Agrippa to take the word in a good sense, but reserving withal his own view, which was certainly the Roman one of the Jewish superstition” (Meyer). vs. 21. *The emperor* — *Sebastos*, the title of the emperor (cf. R. V. margin).

### QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

Why did Festus visit Jerusalem? What proposition was made to him concerning Paul? What was its intent? How did Festus answer the request? What charges were made against Paul before Festus? What did Festus propose? What was Paul's reply? By what right did Paul appeal to Rome? Of what region was Agrippa king? Who was Bernice? What account of Paul did Festus give to Agrippa? What was the design of Festus in giving Paul a hearing before Agrippa? Was it a formal trial?

### COMMENTARY.

I. **Paul and Festus.** Wishing to become thoroughly acquainted with the peculiar local conditions of his province, which was one of the most trying in the Roman dominion, Festus visited Jerusalem immediately after his arrival at Cæsarea. There he was besought, as an especial favor, to summon Paul from Cæsarea, that

he might stand trial before Festus while the latter remained in Jerusalem. Luke alone is authority for the statement that the design was to murder Paul on his way to Jerusalem, since the present governor, who was new in his province, would probably not think it necessary to protect his prisoner with so heavy an escort as Lysias had provided. The unsettled condition of the country makes the suspicion plausible, yet it should be remembered that it is only a suspicion on Luke's part, and that "the chief priests and principal men of the Jews" may have had no such nefarious purpose. Ostensibly the request was only that Paul might be returned from Roman to Jewish jurisdiction, which Festus promptly denied, as befitted a just and honorable governor.

When Paul was arraigned before Festus, on his return to Cæsarea, substantially the same charges were presented as at the trial before Felix, charges of heresy, sacrilege, and sedition. Three courses were open to the governor: he could settle the case himself by conviction or acquittal, he could refer it to Rome, or he could hand the prisoner over to the Jewish authorities to be tried according to their law. Satisfied that Paul was guilty of nothing which made him amenable to Roman law (vss. 18, 19), Festus was minded to release Paul; but like a politic governor, eager to gain favor with the turbulent people of his province, he thought it expedient to gratify their expressed wish and deliver Paul to their judgment.

But since Paul was a Roman citizen, it seems that he could not do this against his will; therefore he asked Paul if he would consent to a trial before the Sanhedrin, he himself being present to insure justice. But Paul knew too well the temper of his countrymen to trust himself again in their power; and therefore with a slight show of indignation at the governor's politic but unworthy proposal, he pronounced the words, "I appeal unto Cæsar," which transferred his case from Cæsarea to Rome. In certain cases the appeal could be refused; therefore it was only after consultation with the "assessors," who were his legal advisers, that Festus entertained the appeal. Thus Paul's long-standing desire to visit Rome was to be gratified, and the promise of the Lord in the Jerusalem vision (xxiii. 11) was to be fulfilled.

**II. Agrippa and Bernice.**—The history of this precious pair furnishes material for a French novel of the worst type. Agrippa was son of Herod Agrippa I., who died in Cæsarea A. D. 44 (Acts xii. 23), and great-grandson of Herod the Great. At the time of his father's death he was living at Rome, a young man seventeen or eighteen years old. Since he was thought too young to inherit his father's kingdom, and his tastes were rather for Roman than for provincial life, he remained in the city till the year 53 A. D. When his uncle, Herod of Chalcis, died (in 48) he was given his kingdom, which in 53 was exchanged for the tetrarchies of Philip and Lysanias, lying to the east and north of Galilee. Subsequently Nero granted him "important parts of Galilee and Perea, namely the cities of Tiberias and Tarichea, together with the lands around belonging to them, and the city Julias, together with fourteen surrounding villages" (Schürer).

While in Rome he rendered efficient service to both Jews and Romans by aiding in the settlement of disputes and postponing the inevitable war. Indeed, if one might venture to add to the innumerable interpretations of 2 Thess. ii. 3-9, it would be a plausible conjecture that "the one that restraineth" was Agrippa II., whose influence over the Jews and intercessions with the Emperor for the removal of causes of insurrection prevented the open falling away of the Jews, which would cause the revelation of the impious cruelty of the Roman power. After coming into his kingdom he certainly did all in his power to keep the Jews from open rebellion.

When the war began, he joined the peace party, and remained the unflinching friend of Rome. After Vespasian's triumph Agrippa received large additions to his territory, and seems to have reigned peacefully till his death, about 100 A. D.

Of his private character the less said the better. His grandfather, Aristobulus, son of Herod the Great and Mariamne, a Maccabean princess, married his own cousin, Bernice. Three children were born: the infamous Herodias, who procured the death of John the Baptist for denouncing her unlawful alliance with Herod Antipas, her own uncle; Herod, king of Chalcis; and Herod Agrippa I. Agrippa I. married Cypros, a distant relative, and had three children: Drusilla, to whom we have already been introduced as the wife of Felix; Agrippa II.; and Bernice, who bore her grandmother's name. Bernice married her own uncle, Herod of Chalcis, and became the mother of two sons.

After her husband's death her relations with her brother, Herod Agrippa II., with whom she lived, became a public scandal; and to avert suspicion she married Polemon, of Cilicia, whom, however, she soon deserted for her brother. In the year 75 she and her brother repaired to Rome, where her intimacy with Titus created so much talk that he was forced to send her away; and although she returned to Rome after the death of Vespasian, Titus, sensible of the dignity pertaining to his high position, completely ignored her, and she went back to Palestine. As she and her brother disappear from historical view, we lose sight of the Herod family, distinguished for its magnificence and its vices.

III. **The Informal Hearing before Agrippa.** — The occasion on which Paul delivered the great speech which we are to study in the next lesson was not a regular trial, but an informal hearing. Its object was twofold: first, to enable Festus, by the aid of Agrippa, who was more conversant with Jewish matters than he, to formulate charges against Paul; and second, to furnish entertainment to the guests of the procurator.

Everything was arranged to ensure a splendid spectacle. Military officers and the magnates of Cæsarea were present; and in splendid procession, with great pomp, the royal visitors entered the audience-room. Then Paul was brought in, his insignificant appearance in striking contrast with the splendor about him; and after a brief statement by Festus of the purpose of the assembly Paul was invited to speak for himself. He spoke for Jesus the Christ.

### TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

The policy of Festus regarding Paul.

Herod Agrippa, the mediator between Jews and Romans.

The history of the Herod family.

## LESSON XXXV.

### PAUL BEFORE AGRIPPA.

LESSON PASSAGE, — Acts XXVI. 1-32.

**Explanatory Notes.** vs. 7. *Twelve tribes* — The nation was still viewed as an unbroken unit (cf. Jas. i. 1). vs. 10. *Gave my vote* — It is not certain, even from this, that Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin, since the phrase may signify only general approval and not a specific casting of a vote. vs. 14. “*To kick against the goad*” — A common classic proverb. The man who held a plough was also the driver, and prodded the ox from behind with his iron-tipped goad. If the animal kicked it was against the goad, which pricked him more severely. This implies that “God had been guiding Paul, and that this zeal for persecution was a resistance of the divine urging.” vs. 24. *Much learning* — This seems to indicate that Paul had quoted largely from the Old Testament in support of his position. vs. 28. Notice particularly the alteration made by the Revised Version. The text is somewhat uncertain, and the exact sense of Agrippa’s remark cannot be discovered. It is certain, however, that Agrippa was not seriously impressed by Paul.

#### QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

Where is Paul standing for trial? Who are the judges? Is it a trial or an informal hearing? What line of defence does Paul adopt? What was the promise made to the fathers? What established the credibility of the resurrection? How had Paul been led to believe in the resurrection of Jesus as an actual fact? What hint is given by the proverb quoted in verse 14 of Paul’s mental condition prior to his conversion? How does this story compare with other reports of the same event? What inference would one naturally draw from verse 20 as to Paul’s manner of life in Arabia? What impression did his speech make upon Festus (vs. 24), Agrippa (28), the other listeners (vs. 31)? What is the real meaning of Agrippa’s remark in verse 28?

#### COMMENTARY.

I. **Paul’s Discourse.** It may be taken for granted, after the study previously given the speeches in Acts, that we have here only an editor’s digest of Paul’s speech, which, however, preserves its principal idea. From the words with which Festus interrupted him we may fairly conclude that Paul had made copious citations from the Old Testament to support his thesis of a crucified and

risen Messiah. It is tolerably evident that the main points of the speech were as follows:—

(a) The Jews expect a Messiah. Throughout the record of Paul's last visit to Jerusalem runs the strain, — I am a Jew, and the more truly a Jew because a Christian. This view is not foreign to Paul's thought as expressed elsewhere, — those who are of faith are the children of faithful Abraham (Gal. iii. 7), and hence the true Jew is known not by outward marks but by inward character (Rom. ii. 28, 29). In Romans, we find a pride in his Jewish ancestry and a passionate longing for the salvation of his own people, which contrast strangely with his indignant outbursts in Galatians.

It seems reasonable to infer, therefore, that as Paul's thought turned toward Jerusalem after his expulsion from Ephesus, something of the old national pride came back to him. He, the greatest "radical" among the Jews, felt himself the most consistent "conservative," since he was following in the footsteps of Abraham, and in his Messianic belief and faith in the resurrection was staunchly upholding the chief tenets of the Pharisees. Consequently he seeks to conciliate Agrippa at the outset by asserting the unity of his life as Pharisee and as Christian.

(b) The Pharisees believe in resurrection. Here again Paul aims to demonstrate that his Christian faith is rooted in Jewish teachings and hopes, for as a Pharisee he was predisposed to believe not only in the Messiah but also in his resurrection. It is clear that Paul intends to discuss only the charge of heresy made against him. By proposing to transfer jurisdiction from a Roman to a Jewish court, Festus had pronounced him innocent of civil crimes, of which alone he, as a Roman official, could take cognizance. Since, therefore, the only charge remaining was that of heresy, and since Agrippa, as an expert in Jewish matters, had been invited to hear Paul that he might aid Festus in formulating the indictment against him, it was proper that Paul should confine himself to this single point. Hence, he affirms that his Christian belief is grounded in Jewish hopes, and cannot be condemned without impeaching universal Jewish expectations.

All this is certainly true, and one may readily see how in certain moods Paul may have urged this plea in entire sincerity; yet it was as a Pharisee, holding firmly to the Messianic idea and the general hope of resurrection, that he had persecuted the Christians, because he saw so clearly the logical, inevitable inferences from their position. It was not for the hope of the fathers, but for teachings which, as Paul very well knew when he was writing to the Galatians, were subverting the entire system of Jewish beliefs

and customs that the apostle was arraigned. Hence Paul's opening was an astute introduction, and indeed may have been spoken with entire sincerity; but it was evading the main question and raising a false issue, nevertheless.

(c) He himself had seen the risen Jesus, and received assurances that he was really the Messiah. Having shown that as a Jew and a Pharisee he believed in the Messiah, and in the possibility of resurrection, he goes on to say that he had become convinced of the resurrection of Jesus, as a particular fact, by seeing and hearing him, and hence he had been led to find in him the fulfilment of his Jewish hopes concerning the Christ. Having this end in view, Paul relates once more the story of his conversion in such a way as will best serve his purpose. To prove that he was not prejudiced in favor of the Christians, he tells of the extremities to which he brought them in his persecuting zeal, and of the important commission against them conferred upon him by the chief Jewish authorities. If, in face of this bitter prejudice, he had become converted, surely it must have been by some marvellously convincing fact.

That fact was a vision, which appeared to him not in the night but at high noon, and in a supernatural brightness, even greater than the light of the sun. It will be observed that he says nothing about being dazzled by the excessive brightness; his object is to remove every possibility of deception or dreaminess.

And the meaning of it was not left to vague guesses and surmisings. He was spoken to in his own tongue, in the Aramaic dialect; and the distinct declaration was made, "I am Jesus." Furthermore, at the same time he was ordered to preach to both Jews and Gentiles the fact of the resurrection and the fulfilment of the Messianic hopes. As a Jew Paul believed in heavenly visions, — how could one question their possibility with the Old Testament before him? — and what vision could be more convincing than this, given in a brightness greater than that of the midday sun, in his own Hebrew speech, and even in the very words of earlier prophetic visions (vs. 16 cf. Ezekiel ii. 1, and often)? And what could be more thoroughly Jewish than his preaching, in obedience to the heavenly vision, that "men should repent and turn to God, and do works worthy of repentance"!

(d) The Jewish prophecies declare that the Christ must suffer and rise again. Paul was probably quoting the usual proof-texts, when Festus, who, of course, could not appreciate the force of such reasoning, broke in upon his discourse, and the hearing was at an end.

The more one studies this address the keener becomes his admiration for it as a rejoinder to the charge of heresy. The endeavor is to show that as a Christian, Paul could not be guilty

of opposing Jewish beliefs, since his present thought presupposed and was the embodiment of the most distinctively Jewish ideas. The Jews believed in the Messiah, a general resurrection, the reality of divine visions, and the authority of Moses and the prophets. Paul believed in Jesus as the Messiah, because by an unmistakable heavenly vision he had been assured that Jesus had actually been raised from the dead, and so declared the Christ, and also because of exactly such a suffering and risen Messiah the law and the prophets had spoken. It is hard to conceive a more complete, and from a Jewish point of view, impregnable reply to the accusation.

II. **The Effect of Paul's Speech.** (*a*) Upon Festus. The idea of resurrection must have seemed nonsensical to Festus. Moreover, if Paul was eager to have his manuscripts brought to him in Rome, he cannot have passed two years in Cæsarea without them. Hence it is not unlikely that he had a reputation among the Romans for poring over books. And as he repeated text after text, which to Festus seemed to have no possible connection with the subject under discussion, the Roman governor jumped to the conclusion that Paul had become insane by his "much reading."

(*b*) Upon Agrippa. It was not Festus, however, but Agrippa to whom Paul was addressing himself. But the Jewish king, although ostensibly a devout Jew, had no deep, positive convictions. Even if the former translation of his answer to Paul could be accepted, we should still be obliged, from what we know of his character, to conclude that he was speaking in flippant irony. But while we cannot be sure what he said, still less what he meant, it is perfectly certain that the rendering of the Authorized Version must be rejected. The most probable meaning is that given in the Revised Version. Yet Agrippa gave as his final opinion that so far as he could discern there was no heresy in Paul sufficient to warrant retaining him in captivity, had his case not already been referred to Rome.

(*c*) Upon the attending men of note. It may be only the chief judges who said one to another, "This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds," but it seems to be the unanimous verdict of all who heard the apostle. So by Jews, by Romans, and by unprejudiced hearers, according to our author, Paul's innocence was acknowledged.

## TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

The literary merit of Paul's speech before Agrippa.

To what proof-texts may Paul have appealed to support his belief in a suffering Messiah?

The meaning of Agrippa's answer.



## LESSON XXXVI.

### THE SHIPWRECK.

LESSON PASSAGE, — Acts xxvii. 1. — xxviii. 1.

**Explanatory Notes.** — vs. 1. *Augustan band* — Among the troops of Herod that passed over to the Romans were certain cohorts of soldiers drafted in the region of Sebaste or Samaria. Our author may have intended to designate one of these cohorts, although the word which he uses can be rendered only Augustan, a title of honor bestowed for distinguished service. “The cohort in question was therefore probably called *cohors Augusta Sebastenorum*. In Cæsarea it was called simply Augustan band, since this sufficed to distinguish it from others” (Schürer). vs. 2. *Adramyttium* — A seaport of Mysia, over against Lesbos. *Aristarchus* — Cf. xix. 29, xx. 4. vs. 3. *Sidon* — “About eighty miles north of Cæsarea.” vs. 5. *Cilicia and Pamphylia* — Southeastern provinces of Asia Minor. *Myra* — A town of Lycia, two or three miles from the sea, on the navigable Andriakus River. vs. 7. *Cnidus* — A city at the tip of a peninsula of southwestern Caria. *Crete* — Candia, the largest island of the Archipelago, southwest from Cnidus; *Salmonè* is its eastern promontory. vs. 8. *Fair Havens* — A harbor, still bearing the same name, on the south of Crete, a few miles east of Cape Matala. *Lasea* — A coast town about five miles east of Fair Havens. vs. 9. *The Fast* — The day of Atonement, occurring near the autumnal equinox, after which navigation was dangerous. vs. 12. *Phoenix* — The site is not determined. To identify it with Lutro requires a dubious interpretation of the last clause in verse 12, which, however, is adopted by the revisers. The harbor of Lutro opens to the east; the more natural rendering of the phrase in question is, “open to the west.” vs. 14. *Euraquilo* — East-northeast wind; not Euroclydon, as in Authorized Version. vs. 16. *Cauda* — A little island to the south of Crete, and not far distant. vs. 17. *Undergirding* — To frap a vessel is to pass chains or cables about it, either horizontally or (more probably) at right angles to the ship, to prevent the planks from spreading. *Syrtis* — Syrtis Major, in the Libyan Sea, southwest from Crete. *Lowered the gear* — A vague expression. To have let the vessel scud under bare poles would have brought it to the Syrtis. Some sail must have been carried: “. . . the principal sail; and the sail lowered is most likely to have

been the one above it, the topsail" (Hackett). vs. 19. *Tackling* — Or furniture (R. V. margin). vs. 27. *Sea of Adria* — Originally applied to the sea north of the Straits of Otranto, but extended by later writers to include the Ionian Sea, and even as far south as the coast of Africa. vs. 37. Note the marginal reading. vs. 40. *Loosing the bands of the rudders* — "Ancient ships were steered by two large paddles, one on each quarter. When anchored by the stern, . . . it would be necessary to lift them out of the water, and secure them by lashings or rudder-bands, and to loose the rudder-bands when the ship was again got under way" (Smith). vs. 41. *Two seas met* — What was taken for a peninsula proved to be a little island; a strong current flowed through the straits between it and Melita. vs. 1. *Melita* — The island now called Malta, in the Mediterranean, about sixty miles south of Sicily.

### QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

At what time of the year did Paul leave Cæsarea for Rome? (vs. 4.) What officer was in charge? What was the Augustan band? Who accompanied Paul? To what point did the first vessel carry the party? Trace the course of the vessel from Cæsarea to Myra. To what vessel was the party transferred at Myra? Describe the voyage from Myra to Fair Havens. Where did Paul advise that the ship should winter? What harbor was approved by the captain? Where did the tempest strike them? What is meant by *Euraquilo*? Where was *Cauda*? What is meant by "undergirding" and "lowering the gear"? Where was the *Syrtis*? How was the ship lightened? What gospel had Paul for the ship's company? Where was the sea of Adria? What signs of land appeared? How was the vessel anchored? What treachery was planned by the sailors? How was it circumvented? Describe the attempt to beach the ship. What was "the place where two seas met"? How did the passengers escape? How many men were on board the ship?

### COMMENTARY.

I. **Perils by Sea.** — There has been so much controversy about the meaning of many of the nautical terms employed in this chapter that only the most assured results can be offered here. Those who wish to carry on more careful investigation are referred to Hackett's "Notes on the Acts," Conybeare and Howson's "Life of St. Paul," and, most important of all, Smith's "Voyage and Shipwreck of St. Paul."

After leaving Cæsarea, the vessel sailed north, and touched at Sidon. Thence the shortest course would have been northwest to Asia Minor, leaving Cyprus on the right. But the steady westerly winds were contrary; and the most practicable course was to sail north along the coast of Syria, and then west between Cyprus and

the mainland through the channel, in which a strong westerly current flows, and where land breezes might be expected.

At Myra a heavily loaded lumbering grain-ship, bound from Alexandria to Italy, was found; and the passengers destined for Rome took passage. The ship managed to beat up against the west wind till it came near Cnidus, at the opening of the Ægean; then it was obliged to alter its course and strike south, passing the eastern extremity of Crete, and getting under the lee of the island. Creeping along the southern shore of Crete, the vessel came to Fair Havens, where Paul advised the centurion to winter; but the opinion of expert navigators was deemed of more value than his, and it was decided to run a few miles farther west, to Phœnix.

So with a fair, softly blowing wind the ship left Fair Havens, and after passing Cape Matala headed across the big bay to Phœnix. But suddenly the breeze veered to the northeast, and a "typhonic wind" began to blow from off Crete, which swept the ship before it. Under the lee of Cauda, which offered some slight protection, the sailors got on board the boat which had been in tow, undergirded the ship, and set storm sails. In spite of the translation of verse 27 ("driven *to and fro* in the sea of Adria"), it is probable that the gale continued to blow from the northeast, and that the vessel drifted steadily in a direction slightly north of west. By computing the average rate of drift, Mr. Smith shows that in almost exactly the time allowed by Acts a vessel would cover the distance lying between Cauda and Melita, and that, starting from Cauda, in the circumstances described, "a ship would by midnight on the fourteenth be less than three miles from the entrance of St. Paul's Bay." Becoming aware that land was near, the sailors anchored by the stern, and waited for day.

In the morning they found themselves apparently at the entrance of a bay, protected by long peninsulas on either side, at the bottom of which was a sandy beach. "By cutting away the anchors, loosening the bands of the rudders, and hoisting the artemon (foresail), all of which could be, as they were in effect, done simultaneously, the ship was immediately under command, and could be directed with precision to any part of the shore" (Smith). When the vessel grounded, the bow stuck fast in clayey mud, but the stern was exposed to the force of a current flowing between Melita and the island which they had taken for a peninsula, and was speedily dashed to pieces. But in various ways all the passengers and crew reached the shore in safety.

The careful investigations of Mr. Smith seem to put beyond reasonable doubt the location of Melita and the accuracy, even down to minute details, of the narrative in Acts. It can hardly be

questioned that our record is, as it purports to be, the work of an intelligent and truthful eye-witness.

II. **The Character of Paul.** — A few traits of character deserve especial notice :—

(a) It was eminently fitting that the master and the owner of the ship should be heeded instead of Paul in questions of navigation ; and yet Paul was not an inexperienced man, and his quick intelligence made him an accurate and competent observer. “ It now appears . . . that Fair Havens is so well protected by islands that, though not equal to Lutro, it must be a very fair winter harbor ; and that, considering the suddenness, the frequency, and the violence with which gales of northerly wind spring up, and the certainty that if such a gale sprang up in the passage from Fair Havens to Lutro the ship must be driven off to sea, the prudence of the advice given by the master and owner was extremely questionable, and that the advice given by Saint Paul may probably be supported, even on nautical grounds ” (Smith).

(b) In the nervous strain under which he and all on board were laboring, Paul had, as might be expected, one of his frequent visions, which enabled him to speak hopefully to his fellow-travellers. To be sure, he could not resist the temptation to begin with an “ I told you so ; ” but it would have been more than human not to recall his advice at Fair Havens, the wisdom of which had been justified by the event.

(c) While all the other landsmen were too excited to observe what was going on, Paul perceived that under pretence of laying anchors from the bow the sailors were preparing to desert the ship. Knowing that if the vessel were abandoned by the sailors it would be at the mercy of the sea, Paul quietly notified the centurion, at whose command the soldiers, with military promptness, cut the ropes and set the boat adrift.

(d) While the day was dawning which was to determine their fate, Paul bethought himself that for the battle with the waves which was imminent all on board needed physical strength ; yet for fourteen days the violence of the storm and the fear it inspired had prevented the passengers and crew from taking their regular meals. Therefore for their safety Paul besought them to take food, and set the example himself, not forgetting the customary words of blessing.

Throughout this account Paul appears as a thoroughly self-possessed man, — cheerful, courageous, and watchful.

### TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

- The ships of Paul's time, how were they built and rigged?
- Paul's experience as a sailor.
- The scene of the wreck.

## LESSON XXXVII.

### THE END OF THE VOYAGE.

#### LESSON PASSAGE,— Acts XXVIII. 2-31.

**Explanatory Notes.**— vs. 2. *Barbarians*—The earliest colonists seem to have been Phœnicians, and the language spoken was, in the main, a Punic dialect. vs. 7. *The chief man*—Supposed by some to be the Roman deputy, but the title refers probably to influence rather than to official position. vs. 11. *Whose sign was The Twin Brothers*—The figure-head of the vessel was images of Castor and Pollux, “tutelary divinities of sailors.” vs. 12. *Syracuse*—On the south-eastern coast of Sicily, about eighty miles north of Melita. vs. 13. *Made a circuit*—The meaning is uncertain; “They were obliged to stand out to sea in order to fill their sails, and so came to Rhegium by a circuitous sweep” (Lewin). Some texts, however, read “having cast loose” (R. V. margin). Observe change from Authorized Version. *Rhegium*—An Italian town at the entrance to the Straits of Messina. *Puteoli*—“The most sheltered part of the Bay of Naples.” It was the principal port of southern Italy, and in particular, it was the great emporium for the Alexandrian wheat-ships” (Smith). vs. 15. *The Market of Appius*—A town about forty miles south of Rome on the Appian Way. *The Three Taverns*—About thirty miles from Rome on the Appian Way. vs. 16. Note the omission: cf. R. V. margin. vs. 20. *Bound with this chain*—To the wrist of the Roman soldier who guarded him. vs. 25. *By Isaiah, the prophet*—cf. Is. vi. 9, 10.

#### QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON PASSAGE.

Did the inhabitants of Melita act like “barbarians”? Why, then, are they called so? What first called their attention to Paul? What was their first opinion of him? How was it changed? What similar change of sentiment is recorded in Acts (Acts xiv. 8-19)? Who was the “chief man” of the island? How did he treat Paul? How was his kindness repaid? What miracles did Paul perform in Melita? In what ship was the voyage continued? What route was followed?

How did the party travel from Puteoli to Rome? How was Paul treated while a prisoner in Rome? How was he welcomed by the Christians? How did the Jews receive him? What was the result of Paul's first discussion with them? How did Paul spend his time in captivity? Did he write any epistles from Rome?

### COMMENTARY.

I. **Paul at Melita.** As illustrations of the captious criticism to which the book of the Acts has been subjected, we may notice two arguments that have been adduced against the identification of Melita with the well-known Malta, or against the general veracity of the account. In vss. 3-6, mention is made of a poisonous viper, which Paul inadvertently gathered up among the sticks he was collecting for the fire. Seeing the viper clinging to his hand the people thought he must be a murderer whom justice was relentlessly pursuing, even though he had escaped the perils of the sea; but when he showed no signs of harm "they changed their minds, and said he was a god." To this it is objected that there are no poisonous serpents in Malta, but that the island of Meleda in the Adriatic, near the coast of Illyria, being dank and densely wooded, abounds with them. But it is evident, on the face of the narrative, that the creature was not venomous, and it is certainly no uncommon thing for ignorant people to regard a snake as poisonous which is really quite harmless (cf. Cable's *Bonaventure*, bk. iii. c. 18). Moreover, change in the civilization and physical character of the island may have resulted in the extermination of many species formerly found on it. Certainly this argument, as alleged, is altogether puerile. Another argument may be quoted, with its answer, from Smith's "*Voyage and Shipwreck of St. Paul*" (p. 172):—

"The only other argument against the supposition that Malta was the scene of the shipwreck which remains unanswered is brought forward by Dr. Falconer: he says, 'The disease with which the father of Publius was affected (dysentery, combined with fever) affords a presumptive evidence of the nature of the island. Such a place as Melita Africanus (Malta), dry and rocky, and remarkably healthy, was not likely to produce a disease which is almost peculiar to moist situations.' It is obvious that the answer to the former argument applies also to this one; but in point of fact, Dr. Galland, of Valletta, informs me that the disease is by no means uncommon in Malta."

The story of the curing of the father of Publius, and also of all others in the island who were sick (for so Luke's words must in strictness be interpreted), suggests a very important considera-

tion. The story occurs in one of the "we" sections, and therefore purports to be by an eye-witness; the description of the disease is said to be couched in precisely the language which a physician would ordinarily use, — yet we do not hesitate to pronounce the paragraph historically incredible. It might, indeed, be granted that the father of Publius recovered, as an accidental coincidence, or by the effect of mental influence; but that "the rest also which had diseases in the island came and were cured" passes belief. We must conclude, therefore, either that this paragraph is an interpolation (but there is not the slightest evidence that it is from another hand than that to which the rest of the section in which it occurs must be attributed), or else that the author of the "we" sections was not above the credulity prevalent in his time, and that *even an eye-witness has related miracles which cannot have occurred.*

The kindness shown the shipwrecked company by the "barbarian" inhabitants of Melita has frequently been compared with the practices of professional wreckers on "Christian" coasts. But barbarian, as here used, is purely a descriptive word, and carries no implication of reproach.

It appears that another grain-ship from Alexandria, bound for Italy, had been forced to winter at Melita, perhaps driven into harbor by the very gale which had caused the destruction of Paul's vessel. Upon this ship, therefore, as soon as navigation was safe, the centurion with his soldiers and prisoners took passage. Coasting along the east side of Sicily, and passing through the Straits of Messina, the vessel came to Puteoli, where its passengers disembarked, and after spending a week with the Christians at Puteoli, Paul with his friends set out for Rome. Entering the Appian Way at Capua, or Sinuessa, they proceeded along this magnificent road to Rome. Attended by members of the Christian community, some of whom had met him at Appii Forum, forty miles out of Rome, and others at The Three Taverns, ten miles farther on, Paul at last entered the city, which he had for many years desired to visit, and where the Lord had promised him an opportunity to bear witness.

II. **Paul in Rome.** For several years there had been a Christian community in Rome. Paul had already written to it, greeting many friends by name. Hence the Jews cannot have been ignorant of Christianity, or of Paul, its most conspicuous representative. Therefore one cannot but be amazed at the way in which they address him, and speak of "this sect," concerning which they knew only that "it is everywhere spoken against." Evidently our author is not distorting facts for the sake of proving that Christianity was introduced into Rome by Paul, since he

has already spoken of "brethren" who came out to meet the apostle on his way to the city. The only plausible explanation is that since the edict of Claudius, which, as has already been intimated, may have been due to tumultuous debates between Jews and Jewish Christians, the Jews may have been exceedingly cautious with regard to the Christians, lest they might again incur the emperor's displeasure. "They saw that Paul was regarded with evident favor by the Roman officers; they had heard from him that the procurator would have acquitted him, but the obstinate Jews had compelled him to appeal to Cæsar. Having had no intelligence from Judea, they might fear that their countrymen there had gone too far, and had placed it in the power of Paul to use the circumstance to the disadvantage of the Jewish cause in Rome" (Hackett). The explanation is by no means entirely satisfactory, but in the present state of our knowledge it seems the best that can be offered.

The book ends abruptly. The "two years" spoken of would bring us about to the persecution of Nero, in which Paul, if he was in Rome at the time, probably perished. It does not fall within the province of these lessons to raise the question whether Paul was released after one trial before Nero, and subsequently rearrested, condemned, and executed. We need not go beyond what is written at the close of the book we have been studying. "And he abode two whole years in his own hired dwelling, and received all that went in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, none forbidding him" (cf. Phil. i. 12-30, iv. 10-22).

### TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION.

The value of Luke's testimony to miracles.

Can Paul and "this sect" have been unknown to the Jews in Rome?

Why was Christianity everywhere spoken against?

The spirit of Paul the captive, as shown in the Epistle to the Philippians.



## LESSON XXXVIII-XL.

### THE GENUINENESS AND AUTHENTICITY OF THE ACTS.

AFTER finishing our survey of the book, we have now to consider the difficult question of its genuineness and authenticity. In critical terminology, by the genuineness of a work is meant that it was written by the author whose name it bears, while authenticity relates solely to the accuracy and fulness with which it presents the facts that come within its scope. Keeping this distinction in mind, we ask first, Was the Acts written by its alleged author?

The only claim of authorship which the book itself makes is that it was written by the same hand as the Third Gospel (i. 1; cf. Luke i. 1-4). Since the latter book does not claim unique or even apostolic authority, no reason appears why an independent author should have sought to gain additional credence for his work by allying it falsely with the Gospel. Unless, therefore, there is strong internal evidence that the two cannot have proceeded from the same hand, we shall not be justified in setting aside the claim which the Acts makes for itself. At the outset we discovered a marked discrepancy between the Gospel and the Acts regarding the time of the Ascension (p. 3), which undoubtedly makes against identity of authorship. If, however, we may suppose that some little time elapsed between the two books, or that in the second a tradition was followed, without remark, different from that adopted in the Gospel, the divergence would be less important. That our author is not particularly scrupulous about self-contradictions has appeared in our study of the accounts of Paul's conversion (pp. 46, 123). On the other hand, the Acts shows so many points of fundamental agreement with the Gospel that most critics have ascribed them to the same author.

I. The linguistic peculiarities indicate a common authorship. Although literary resemblances of word and phrase must not be unduly pressed, it is significant that there are many words found in the Gospel and the Acts which do not appear elsewhere in the New Testament. There are also favorite words which occur several times in each book, but rarely in other portions of the New Testament. The full presentation of this argument is of course impossible in a book intended only for English readers; but lists of the distinctive words may be found most conveniently in Thayer's *Lexicon of the New Testament Greek*, or Simcox's "The Writers of the New Testament."

II. The Prominence of Women in the two books is very significant. In the Gospel we read of Elisabeth, mother of John, Anna, the prophetess, the widow of Nain, Joanna and Susanna, and many other women "which ministered unto him of their substance," the woman out of the multitude who blessed the mother of Jesus, the woman who was loosed from her infirmity on the Sabbath, the woman having ten pieces of silver, the widow who goaded an unjust judge to his duty, the daughters of Jerusalem, etc. The Third Gospel is the Gospel in which woman plays an important part; and a similar characteristic is found in the Acts. Women met with the disciples in the upper room, at the election of Matthias (p. 6); the Spirit falls upon daughters as upon sons (ii. 18); Dorcas is mentioned as "full of good works and almsdeeds" (ix. 36); Lydia is the first convert in Macedonia (p. 90; cf. p. 76); "Devout women not a few" are referred to in connection with nearly every church; Priscilla and Aquila bring Apollos to truer knowledge, etc. In both the Gospel and the Acts women are frequently mentioned, and with honor.

III. In each book the Gentiles are receivers of the Gospel equally with the Jews. In the Third Gospel Simeon sees in Jesus a light to lighten the Gentiles; and Jesus begins his ministry in the synagogue of Nazareth by declaring that he is sent to those outside of Israel. The Gospel has sometimes been called the Gospel of the Gentiles; and a similar point of view is held by the Acts. Philip and Peter are the first to preach the Gospel to those not belonging to the chosen people; and after investigation, their work is formally approved by the Church at

Jerusalem. Stephen before the Sanhedrin and Paul on Mars' Hill proclaim a universal religion. This is not the point of view of the other Synoptics, or indeed of the Church as a whole during its early period.

IV. More specifically, both the Third Gospel and the Acts are marked by a kindly feeling toward the Samaritans, which allies them together. Only in the Gospel ascribed to Luke do we find the parable of the Good Samaritan, and the story of the one leper out of ten who returned to give thanks for his healing, — “and he was a Samaritan.” In the Third Gospel, moreover, instead of the rapid Perea journey to Jerusalem by the road lying east of the Jordan, we have a solemn progress of several months through Samaria, and the mission of the seventy. Similarly in the Acts we learn that the first successes of the Church outside of Jerusalem were achieved by Philip, in Samaria, and the new converts were welcomed by the rest of the brethren. The Samaritan episode in the Gospel is matched by the preaching of Philip in the Acts. Thus, in each book, besides the universality of view with regard to the mission of Jesus, we find especial prominence given to the Samaritans, of whom in the other Synoptics Jesus never makes mention, save to forbid his apostles to visit their cities.

V. For convenience we will group together a few coincidences which ought to be mentioned, but cannot be dwelt upon at length: the mistake as to Annas (p. 19), the mention of Herod as taking part in the trial of Jesus (p. 17), the last interview near Jerusalem and the visible ascension of Jesus (p. 3), the agreement in the lists of apostles (p. 6), the communism of the Acts and the ever-present sympathy with the poor in the Gospel, the “angelology” of both books, the lyric quality of speeches and hymns, etc. Such parallelisms as these are even more important than the large resemblances previously pointed out; and a careful student of both books can hardly fail to decide that the same author is responsible for the final form of each. But the book of the Acts carries on its face no other claim than that it was written by the author of the Third Gospel; and having found no internal evidence sufficient to warrant us in setting aside the statement, we must, in fairness, conclude that *the responsible author of the Third Gospel is also the author of the Acts of the Apostles.*

We have next to inquire whether it is possible to discover who this author was. Was it Luke, as reported by tradition? From the last quarter of the second century we find reasonable agreement in the Church that the Third Gospel and the Acts were written by one Luke, a physician and a travelling companion of Paul. In the New Testament Luke is mentioned only in Philemon (vs. 24), and in the much more doubtful epistles to the Colossians (iv. 14), and Timothy (2 Tim. iv. 11). He was, then, not a man of note in apostolic or sub-apostolic times, — not a person to whom one would be likely to ascribe an anonymous book for the sake of enhancing its authority. Therefore, unless we find some opposing internal evidence, the tradition has a right to stand. Possession has some rights in literature, as well as in law.

Moreover, the tradition has a certain support in the facts of the book. Attention has been called in the Lessons to the appearance of sections in the Acts wherein the narrative changes from the third person to the first, — the so-called “we” sections (pp. 90, 114, 144). From Troas to Philippi this unknown man accompanies Paul, then stays at Philippi, where he is picked up by Paul on his last voyage to Jerusalem, and apparently goes with him to Rome. Who was the author of the “we” sections? It cannot have been Timothy, for in xx. 5 it is said that Timothy with others had gone on ahead and was waiting *for us* at Troas. It was not Silas, for the “we” sections do not include the periods during which Silas attended him. Tradition says it was Luke; but whoever it was, *the book of the Acts contains sections written by a travelling companion of Paul, whose presence is indicated by the use of the pronoun “we.”*

But was the author of the “we” sections also the author of the entire book? The assumption must be that he was, for the book begins with a personal address, — “The former treatise have *I* written, O Theophilus” — and it would naturally be expected that a subsequent “we” would include the “*I*” of the introduction. That the Acts, like the Gospel, contains material derived not from personal knowledge, but from hearsay, or even written records, may be taken for granted; yet the material has been well worked over, and as a whole the book bears the marks of style which betoken a single author. It is hardly conceivable, in view of the general character of the book, that its author would have incor-

porated a document written by another without altering the significant pronoun, which would naturally include him in its compass. *Unless evidence can be adduced to the contrary, the presumption will stand that the author of the "we" sections is the author of the entire book, and consequently that the Acts, as a whole, was written by a travelling companion of Paul.*

Against this presumption, however, it is urged that the evidence of date is decisive. That the book, as we have it, is of late origin will be at once admitted. It purports to have been written after the Third Gospel; but this Gospel, as a comparison of its eschatological discourse with the reports given in the other Synoptics proves, must have been written subsequent to the destruction of Jerusalem, yet, as appears from xxi. 32, before the generation of those who had known Jesus had entirely passed from the scene. Furthermore, the Gospel refers to various written accounts of the life of Jesus which certainly cannot have existed till some time after the fall of the city. It is incontestable that the Third Gospel, as we have it, cannot have come into existence earlier than toward the close of the first century; and the Acts must be of still later date. A book written as late as 100 A.D. may very well be the work of one who as a young man had known and travelled with Paul. The chief argument against so early a date would be the hints of a hierarchy in the Church, or more concretely, the notion that church officers were appointed by the apostles (cf. p. 80), and that the Spirit was imparted by the laying on of hands (pp. 43, 108). Yet the same teaching with regard to the appointment of the presbyters is found in Clement of Rome (c. 97 A.D.), and in the Pastoral Epistles, which, although not by Paul, probably date from the very beginning of the second century. We read that the gift which was bestowed upon Timothy was through the laying on of hands, — Paul's (2 Tim. i. 6) or the Presbytery's (1 Tim. iv. 14). Moreover, in the Acts the organization of the Church is very simple, — the presbyters are identical with the bishops (p. 115). We must observe, also, that in the Acts we have at least two distinct strata of tradition. In one, the laying on of hands signifies that the person so designated, being already full of the Spirit, has been set apart for an especial work (p. 31); in another, the Spirit is communicated by the act of imposition; in one, church officers are elected by the congrega-

tion (pp. 8, 31); in another, they are appointed by the apostles; in one, the gift of tongues implies the ability to speak in foreign languages (p. 10); in the other, it is merely a sort of incoherent babble, which is supposed to betoken the presence of the Spirit (x. 46; cf. 1 Cor. xiv. 18). But even in the later stratum there is nothing which unmistakably carries us beyond the beginning of the second century; and the Christology of the book, its use of the simple baptismal formula, and the democracy of the Church, although these may have belonged to the earlier stratum, yet show *by their retention* that the final author cannot have lived in a period when these views would have been especially obnoxious. Considerations of chronology, therefore, do not certainly carry us beyond a date of authorship possible to a companion of Paul.

But if the author was a friend of Paul, how can he have been mistaken about the nature of the gift of tongues? and how can he have supposed that the free gift of the Spirit was conditional upon the imposition of an apostle's hands? It cannot be denied that such questions, with others that have arisen in the detailed study of the book, weaken the argument in favor of Luke's authorship. Nevertheless they do not destroy or even seriously disturb it, if we take into account the following considerations: (a) The book cannot have been written till at least forty years after the events narrated; and in half a century the memory of details necessarily grows dim and uncertain. (b) The author was manifestly of an idealizing, poetic turn of mind, and not a strict annalist or chronicler of facts. (c) The peculiar theology of Paul with reference to the law, etc., was no longer of vital importance in the circles in which this author lived, and therefore it is not strange that it should have partly faded out of his memory. Acknowledging, therefore, the force of the arguments against the traditional authorship, we still cannot feel that they are conclusive. In such matters certainty is unattainable; but the probability is that in the book of the Acts we have the production of a companion of Paul, who wrote such portions of the narrative as came by his personal experience in the diary form, and relied for the rest upon other sources of information.

Is it possible to determine what these sources were? By virtue of the extraordinary achievements of Old Testament critics, docu-

mentary theories are in great vogue nowadays ; and it behoovés us to be on our guard lest the momentum of scholarship carry us too far in this direction. Attempts have been made to separate certain documents which are supposed to be imbedded in the Acts, but so far with very little success. One hypothesis may be mentioned, however, which carries on its face a certain degree of plausibility. According to the Acts Paul was a captive for two years in Cæsarea ; and presumably the author of the "we" sections was with him during at least a portion of the time. On his way to Jerusalem Paul had stayed at the house of Philip, the Evangelist, then living in Cæsarea ; and it is more than probable that Luke, while lingering in Cæsarea during Paul's captivity, saw very much of the Evangelist. From whom, therefore, was he so likely to hear of the conversion of the Samaritans, and indeed of the events which had occurred during the early days of the Church? It is at least worth considering whether Luke did not gather the materials for the early history of the Church, and for such parts of the life of Jesus as are peculiar to his Gospel, from Philip, the Evangelist, whom he met at Cæsarea. There are many arguments in support of this hypothesis, a few of which may be enumerated very briefly.

(a) As an Evangelist and a Hellenist, Philip must have thrown the facts which formed the substance of his preaching into homiletical form, — into pictorial, dramatic, objective speech ; and precisely this is the character of the stories in the Jerusalem part of the book. They are *representative* in form, as might be expected if coming from a preacher like Philip.

(b) Philip was the first Christian preacher to Samaria, and if derived from him, the Samaritan character of Luke's Gospel would thus be easily accounted for. If an author shows exceptional interest in a certain country, which others who are working with him ignore, and we have evidence of his intimacy with one who was especially familiar with that region, how can we help concluding that the author has drawn largely upon his friend's knowledge and sympathies? Philip was preacher to Samaria ; Luke was in Cæsarea with him, and in all probability was often at his house ; is it not easy, then, to understand the Samaritan character of the Gospel?

(c) Philip was also a Hellenist, and clearly a follower of Stephen,

who was the leader of the universal party in the primitive Church. Naturally, therefore, in his thought and preaching he would emphasize the broader elements of the thought of Jesus, and those traits in the Church with which he was most in sympathy. As a representative of the larger thought, he would naturally have been on the best of terms with Paul; and his friend, also, would have been inclined to his view of Jesus and the history of the Church. In this way the universal characteristics in the Gospel and the Acts are easily comprehensible.

(a) Philip had also "four daughters which did prophesy;" and it cannot be that their preaching was not calculated to lay stress upon the gentler, more feminine traits in the character of Jesus, and upon the place filled by women in caring for Jesus, and in shaping the early history of the Church. May it not be due to the daughters of Philip that we have the beautiful stories of Mary and Elisabeth, the hymns of rejoicing over the birth of Jesus, the presence of that deference to woman which we found as one of the pervading characteristics of the Gospel and the Acts?

Other facts might be cited to support the notion that from Philip of Cæsarea, Luke derived the unique portions of his Gospel, and the early history of the Acts; but enough has already been brought forward to give color to the hypothesis—for it is nothing more—and to ensure its careful consideration. In conclusion we may say that while the arguments for and against the genuineness of the Acts are pretty evenly balanced, it seems best, on the whole, to accept the book as a genuine production of Luke, a friend and companion of Paul, written near the close of the first century or at the very beginning of the second.

Of more importance than the genuineness of the book is its authenticity. Does it give a fairly accurate account of the events it describes, or is it colored by prepossessions and warped by party bias? We dismiss at once all thought of infallibility. Our study has put it beyond question that we have before us a human book, with the faults and the virtues of contemporary literature. Finding it thoroughly human, we have no right to look for anything more than would naturally pertain to ordinary human work at the time and in the circumstances of its composition. It must be tested not by present, but by contemporary standards of historical **excellence**. It is only the lingering survivals of the ancient, out-



worn doctrine of infallibility which lead us to expect more from the books of the Bible than we could hope to find in other books of like date and authorship. In his life of Cotton Mather, Barrett Wendell says of the "Magnalia": "Admitting once for all every charge of inaccurate detail, I am inclined to think the veracity of spirit which pervades the book of very high order. Somehow, as no one else can, Cotton Mather makes you by and by feel what the Puritan ideal was; if he does not tell just what men were, he does tell just what they wanted to be, and what loyal posterity longed to believe them." That appears to be a fair criticism of the "Magnalia," and as I believe, of the book of the Acts also. That our book is saturated with the marvellous, and therefore is, in so far forth, to be regarded untrustworthy, must be frankly admitted; but the essential veracity of its author or the substantial accuracy of his narrative is not thereby impugned. If it were not tintured with magic, it could hardly be a human book as human nature went in the Christian Church at the beginning of our era. The anachronisms and historical blunders which have been freely pointed out in the course of our study do not seriously impeach the general authenticity of the book.

But the assertion is frequently made that the Acts is a piece of "tendency writing" designed to harmonize conflicting parties in the Church by showing that Paul was a good Jewish Christian and Peter an equally good Gentile Christian. We need not tarry long over the assertion that an attempt is made to represent Paul and Peter as on an equality by matching a miracle of one with a miracle of the other, for the laws of legend-making were the same in accounts of both apostles, and similar stories may have been told of both. In other words, it is the author's selective, not creative, purpose that has been at work. Yet it should be acknowledged that the Paul of Acts is a very much less pronounced anti-Judaist than the Paul of Galatians, and that Peter is much more liberal than from Paul's account we might have expected to find him. Have the portraits of the two chief apostles been touched up for a purpose?

It is unfair to compare Paul in the Acts with Paul in the Galatians, for in the latter instance Paul has been driven into a position which was even for him extreme. That epistle was written when Paul was at a white heat, and certainly does not represent his

habitual thought and temper. In Galatians the Jews are children of the bond-woman Hagar, and it is written, "Cast out the bond-woman and her son" (iv. 30); but in Romans Paul vindicates the prerogatives of the Jews as bearers of the oracles of God, and predicts that all Israel shall be saved (cf. Romans ix.-xi.). It is in Romans, and not in Galatians, that the true Paul appears. This, then, must be constantly remembered: that *Galatians represents an extreme mood of the apostle, and an unusually anti-Judaistic phase of his thought.*

Again, as we have had occasion to remark many times in the course of these Lessons, Paul was pre-eminently a man of moods; indeed so noticeable was this characteristic that one of the most common charges against him was that he was weak, vacillating, a time-server. This charge is often referred to in his undoubted epistles (cf. e. g. Gal. i. 10; Rom. iii. 8; 1 Thess. ii. 3-5); and in Corinthians he frankly admits the fact which gave ground for the accusation (1 Cor. ix. 20). It has been urged as quite incompatible with Paul's own declarations that he should be represented in Acts as preaching first in the synagogues of the Jews; but in Romans (i. 16, ii. 10) he expressly vindicates the principle upon which he acted. The various instances in which Paul is reported to have acted as the writer of the epistle to the Galatians — so it is argued — could not have done, we have already considered in the course of our study (cf. pp. 86, 106, 119). In view of Paul's temperament as disclosed by his own admissions, and indirectly in his epistles, there seems to be no good reason for denying that he may not have done everything reported of him in the Acts.

The other question — whether Peter is not represented as unduly Pauline — has been discussed sufficiently in Lesson XV. (pp. 58-60). That the Church in Jerusalem was opposed to the freer teaching of Paul is acknowledged in the Acts (xxi. 17-22); but it by no means follows that in the early times, before the Hellenists were cast out, and James became head of the Church, there may not have been a more liberal spirit. Sometimes narrowness succeeds to breadth when the consequences of freedom become apparent. The liberality of Paul may have been one of the reasons for the bigotry of James.

It must be observed that no plea is made for the entire trustworthiness of the book we have been studying; its historical

inaccuracies have been candidly pointed out, and many of its representations questioned; undoubtedly the author's sympathies led him to select incidents which showed Peter and Paul in the most friendly relations, and the Church at Jerusalem in the most favorable light. The selection and the coloring of facts were in the interest of harmony; but that the book is merely an historical romance cut out of whole cloth we have seen to be a quite untenable hypothesis. Notwithstanding its accretions of marvel, its long speeches which probably contain substance of truth in the garb of fancy, its occasional anachronisms and errors and undue stress upon certain classes of facts, this book must be regarded, judged by the standard of the time, as a thoroughly honest, and in the main, as an authentic piece of historical writing. It stands to the history of the primitive Church as Cotton Mather's "Magnalia" does to the early history of New England.



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